Abraham Lincoln's Religion

DR. G. GEORGE FOX

E457
.2.F79

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
JAN 24 1964
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
E457
.2.F79

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S RELIGION

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
JAN 24 1964
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Abraham Lincoln's Religion

SOURCES OF THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR'S
RELIGIOUS INSPIRATION

by

Dr. G. George Fox

An Exposition-Banner Book

EXPOSITION PRESS NEW YORK

EXPOSITION PRESS INC., 386 Fourth Avenue, New York 16, N.Y.

FIRST EDITION

© 1959 by Dr. G. George Fox. *All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form, except for brief quotations in reviews and critical essays.* Manufactured in the United States of America.

Dedicated

to the memory of the late

JACOB LOGAN FOX, SR.

Lover of Abraham Lincoln

and to

NATHAN H. SCHWARTZ

Civic and Religious Leader

and Lincoln Student

PREFACE

THIS STUDY, *Abraham Lincoln's Religion,* was undertaken several years ago. It was first intended as a magazine article; but as I continued to assemble the data, it gradually reached its present length.

No extended work on this subject has been done of late, though Lincoln's religion is a subject of deep interest to many people. This study is largely the result of the encouragement given me by Mr. Ralph G. Newman, the founder of the famous Lincoln Book Shop of Chicago and a widely recognized authority on the life and times of the martyred President. I hereby publicly acknowledge my obligation to him.

I want also to express my thanks to Dr. Samuel Schwartz, Mr. Lawrence Levin, and to Mr. Nathan R. Levin, the Assistant Librarian of the Chicago Public Library. Mr. Nathan R. Levin was especially helpful because of his careful reading of the manuscript and the many valuable suggestions he made.

G.G.F.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S RELIGION

INTRODUCTION

As we are celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth year of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, interest in his life becomes deeper and more intensive. Further research and study have brought about some changes in our former knowledge of his times and of his life. His habits, his attitudes, his beliefs and even his personal relations with friend and foe, have been scrutinized under the impact of new knowledge, and there is a renewed and vivid interest in his personality as well as in the evaluation of his contributions to our nation's history. There are some who speak of the "real" Lincoln in not very respectful terms, but there are few who deny his part in saving the nation; no one can take this immortal role from him. Though some of the romance of his early life has been dispelled, historical material gathered and processed by such students of Lincoln as Albert J. Beveridge, J. G. Randall, Benjamin P. Thomas, William E. Barton, Carl Sandburg, Roy P. Basler, Paul M. Angle and others, still bears witness to the fact that Abraham Lincoln, without any semblance of a doubt, played the major role in saving our Union.

These, and other students of Lincoln, his times and his activities, do not always write about him in a vein of fanatic admiration. They were interested in giving his countrymen as true an evaluation of his services as he was entitled to have. Their aim was to present him as they believed he actually lived and acted; and to ascertain, if possible, his place in the history of our country, the value of his contributions to it, and the effect of his life on human history.

A number of biographies of Lincoln followed his death. As early as 1865, Henry Raymond and J. G. Holland had written their histories of him. Holland had called Lincoln a

"great Christian," and devoted four pages of his book to showing that he was just that. Later came the histories of the life of the martyr by William Herndon and his great friend, Ward Hill Lamon. That of William Herndon, the law partner of Lincoln for twenty years, was the most popular. But both Herndon and Lamon disagreed with Holland regarding Lincoln's religion. They labelled Lincoln an "unbeliever." Readers of the books by these authors began to battle over the "religion" of Lincoln. Lamon repeated the position of Herndon who had called him a "deist" and an "infidel," and sometimes an "atheist," and insisted that "he had held many of the Christian beliefs in derision," and that he "never used the name Jesus but to confute the idea that he was Christ." These allegations outraged the feelings of many good Christians who refused to believe that the savior of the Union was not a pious, professing Christian.

The discussions about the religion of Lincoln grew very heated at times and lasted for many years. Few authoritative books have been written about it; the best reason perhaps being, that the great President himself vouchsafed to few what his real religion was, if indeed he had ever formulated it. There are a number of volumes published with accounts of some of his religious beliefs. Most are written from a biased point of view. The one considered best is that of William E. Barton, the *Soul of Lincoln*, published in 1920. In spite of the fact that Barton tried desperately to make a "Christian" out of Lincoln, it is, by and large, the most authoritative study of the religion of the Emancipator.

It is easy to understand why the discussion about Lincoln's religion waxed so hot. Herndon, Lincoln's partner, and Lamon, his friend, who were closer to him than any of the early biographers, both regarded him as an agnostic. Another close friend and fellow worker who made the rounds of the eighth judicial circuit with him, Judge Henry C. Whitney,

speaks of Lincoln's utter disregard for those ritualistic observances and ceremonial symbols which are characteristic of traditional Christianity. Joshua Speed, James Matheny and John Todd Stuart, his early friends in Springfield, considered him an infidel. Jesse W. Fell, an intimate friend from Bloomington, believed that if he were not an outright infidel, he was pretty close to it. These friends made no attempt to place Lincoln in the category of professing Christians. There is enough historical evidence to show that, at times, he did attend church both in Springfield and in Washington. But we have learned that not all who attend church believe what the church teaches. There is no doubt about the fact that Lincoln was not a church affiliate. But that does not prove that he may not have been sympathetic toward some things the church taught, or that he was an agnostic, which I definitely believe he was not.

Because we lived in that part of Illinois where Lincoln spent his later youth, I became interested in him. Later I became interested in his religion or what I believed to be his religion. I came to understand that while he was not a dogmatic Christian, he was still a deeply religious man, in the broader sense of the word. This seems to be particularly true of his later years. I do not believe that any student of the President's recorded writings—if he accepted a liberal interpretation of the word "religion"—would doubt this statement. About the fact that he leaned heavily upon his interpretation of religion, there can be no quibbling. He felt keenly that the lives and destinies of nations and men were directed by God Almighty. He believed that God guided, inspired and directed him, and that the means of communication between God and man was prayer. He was certain that the Maker was always near him; and he had an ineradicable will to be on the side of God who, to him, was always in the right. He believed that God was the Father of all

men and therefore, all men were brothers. Out of this concept of equality flowed his faith in the final triumph of justice: justice with mercy, nationally and individually.

Lincoln had many enemies who believed that he was a son of the devil, rather than a son of God. But what they never gave him credit for and could not understand was that, where to them he was guilty of evil, for him, what they considered bad, was the processing of the will of his Father. He was carrying out the command of the Almighty; and God could not be wrong or be on the unrighteous, evil side.

His deep and sometimes naïve faith in prayer, which was born of his feeling of nearness to God, his profound sense of justice, and his immeasurable trust in the ultimate victory of righteousness, were the three religious essentials, which armed him with an unflinching faith that the nation which was on the side of God—and he believed this nation was—would ultimately be victorious.

To disclose the sources of Lincoln's religion and religious inspiration is the purpose of this work. To confirm the proposition that Abraham Lincoln was a religious man, par excellence, is the aim of this work.

My fervent wish, of course, is that I have contributed some light to the study of the religion of Abraham Lincoln.

II

In a recent newspaper article, a history professor in a well-known western university, published the information that the Pilgrims did not come to America for religious freedom; that they did not land at Plymouth Rock; and that they did not live in log cabins. He is alleged to have said that all of these are "incorrect stories about the Pilgrim Fathers" and are genuine examples of "folk myths." The Pilgrims, he maintained, came to the New World for the economic opportunities that it offered, and because they feared that a long stay in Holland—though they had religious freedom there—would rob their children of their English nationality and their English culture, and so they contemplated moving. As for Plymouth Rock, "the first mention of that famous landmark was made 100 years after their arrival in 1620."

The professor was partly right and partly wrong. Those heroic souls who came in the *Mayflower* and reached New England, had been of those non-conformist dissenters who were a part of the Scrooby center of Separatism, who refused to be a part of the Church of England because they wanted freedom to worship according to their consciences.

In 1593, a group of such Dissenters or Independents fled from London to Amsterdam, because they refused to accept the restrictions and penalties imposed by the Church of England on their mode of church organization and worship. This particular group became known as the "Scrooby Dissenters." After a few years in Amsterdam, they became unhappy and restless. There was a gradual deterioration of both their religious life and their culture, and they feared

that in time they would disappear as a community. They wished to preserve their religious, cultural and national identity. They believed that the social life of the city was shot through with immorality, licentiousness and evil which would ultimately destroy them as a religious communion and as a national entity.

After the congregation decided to leave, the matter of their destination was considered. Some of their former countrymen had crossed the Atlantic and formed a colony at Jamestown, in Virginia. The group now turned their faces toward the West; but there was another matter to be considered. Besides their spiritual needs, there were also the material. Their kinsmen informed them that there was good fishing and that there were good prospects of successful trading in southern Virginia. They decided to try their fortune in the New World, and left on the *Mayflower*, landing after a hard trip at the site of Plymouth, Massachusetts, on December 11, 1620. After a few days of rest and discussion, they decided to remain there, and on December 25, they began the erection of their first building.

We have an interesting and, I believe, authoritative account of the Mayflower group and the expedition written by one of its leaders, Governor William Bradford, in his *History of the Plimouth Plantation.* I find no statement anywhere that the Scrooby contingent at any time since the separation from the Church of England, whether in London, or in Holland, or in the New World, ever made their "economic possibilities," their first and primary consideration. I do not find that the Pilgrims ever displaced their loyalty to their religion, by the lure of "economic opportunities." Their outstanding interest was in the domain of religious life, even in later years, shaped congregational organization in which, even in later years, shaped congregational organization in Massachusetts.

As for the "Plymouth Rock's mention a hundred years after the arrival of the Pilgrims," it is possible that there is some truth in this statement as far as the name of the Rock itself is concerned. But the granite boulder upon which some Pilgrims stepped from their light open boat was there in Plymouth all the time, and in 1920 the Society of Colonial Dames had it placed on the spot it originally occupied when they landed. They may not have called the granite rock on which they stepped, "Plymouth Rock," but to say that the story of Plymouth Rock is a folk myth, is far from the truth.

The California teacher is following the examples set by modern historians, who hold the view that only that historical information is valuable which has been thoroughly processed and confirmed by written records and whose historic authenticity is unassailable.

Lincoln scholars, in the last few years, have taken a similar position insofar as a record of the life of Lincoln is concerned. It is perhaps a reflection of the modern "efficiency" cult which shows itself in art, in letters and particularly in architecture. Even church edifices have come under the sovereignty of "efficiency." There are few ornate church structures, apartment or office buildings, or museums. They have to be efficient, even if they look like tremendous boxes; and this applies even to the new type of "efficiency" houses of worship that often remind one of large warehouses. So it is to be supposed that in a life of Abraham Lincoln today only those facts should be used which can be corroborated by authenticated documents. Hence it is, that in the latest and certainly one of the most valuable collections of Lincolniana, we find this statement of the editors: "Utterances recorded only in memoirs, diaries, and reminiscences have been excluded for obvious reasons."

The collection to which I refer is known as the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* and was published in 1953. It is

the product of the Abraham Lincoln Association, which, since 1924, has had as its aim the collection of Lincoln's "unpublished writings and speeches." The present work, consisting of nine volumes, has not gone beyond this goal, confining itself only to authenticated items. The editorial advisers to the Abraham Lincoln Association were Paul M. Angle, the late J. G. Randall and the late Benjamin P. Thomas. The editor was Roy P. Basler. It is impossible to find a quartet of Lincoln scholars to equal this group. Their research and editorial direction have resulted in the most valuable and most authentic collection of Lincoln material in existence, and it is recognized by Lincoln students as the standard work on the life of the Great Emancipator.

They adopted their criteria because of the personal bias in memoirs, diaries and reminiscences, which may make the particular work that is being used, unreliable and even unhistorical. The object of the *Collected Works,* is to give as factual an account of Lincoln's work as it is possible to get; personal anecdotes, personal reminiscences and personal evaluations by authors may not meet the standards of correctness or historicity. In the attempt to meet the canons of scholarship, rather than those of personal reactions to men and events, the California professor and the editors of the *Collected Works* agree.

But just as the professor strays from the complete truth so far as the settlement of Plymouth is concerned, so does the *Collected Works* omit much about Abraham Lincoln that is contained—and much of it valid—in the various works about Lincoln, that cannot claim complete historical trustworthiness according to the standards of scholarship that the editors set before them. And it is my feeling that a sketch of Lincoln cannot be complete without the use of some of these sources, which "for obvious reasons" are excluded by the editors.

I remember distinctly that when I was a boy and lived in Greenview, Illinois, a few miles from Petersburg, near Old Salem, in Menard County, the two elderly Pond Brothers who lived near the town, thrilled me with tales about the days when the young Lincoln worked at times on their father's farm; splitting rails during the day, and studying at night. This story is clearly outside of the range of the *Collected Works,* but it is nevertheless a part of the early life of Lincoln; I never had any reason for doubting the words of these two old pioneers—I didn't then and I don't now.

I know that the custom among students of Lincoln now is to discount any life of Lincoln that has not been scientifically "processed," and to throw into the historic rubbish heap the many old biographies of the martyred President by those who knew him or were associated with him, particularly, if many years had passed between his life and that of the narrators. But I submit that the people who know one best are those associated with one a great deal or have intimately known one the longest. Final judgments about individuals need not be made during their lifetime or even by some of their literary remains, but there is no certainty that if the intimate and friendly accounts of their lives are omitted, the residual "historical" matter will be completely full and correct. The *Collected Works,* wonderful as it is, by its very nature, does not permit a complete inclusion of a study of the religious and spiritual content of Lincoln's life—and who can deny that there was a rich spiritual element in his make-up and in his activities? Much of the knowledge of this phase of his life comes from those very sources which the editors of the *Collected Works* by-passed.

In writing this study, therefore, since it deals with Lincoln's religion, I have availed myself of many sources that come under the head of "utterances, memoirs, reminiscences, interviews" and so forth. And it may be that some of the

matter that I include comes also from the collections that were withheld from the *Collected Works.* I have tried in every instance to give accurately the sources of my information, and have proceeded on the theory that many who knew Lincoln, admired him, and wrote about him, and were to a more or less degree correct, I am not forgetting that time and sentiment play an important part in some of the writings I have used. Nor am I forgetting the variety of the descriptions touching on his life, which are exhibited in these works. Depending upon the opinion of the writer, Lincoln was a saint, a sinner, a prophet, a scoundrel, a hypocrite, an ingrate or a liar. Yet most of his biographers agree upon the salient features of his life. Most of them accept certain marked characteristics as having been definitely his. In later research, some of the things that enshrined his name have been found to have been the products of romantic notions and sanctified legends of admiring friends and neighbors.

Four outstanding investigators of the more recent and more scientific type, like Beveridge, Randall, Angle and Basler, have deflated to a large extent some of the legends that had grown around Lincoln's name and personality. Former United States Senator Albert J. Beveridge, now deceased, spent many years in writing a life of Abraham Lincoln. Two volumes were published. Death cut off the remainder. Professor J. G. Randall, also deceased, was a professor of history at the University of Illinois. He wrote *The Civil War and Reconstruction* and *Lincoln, the President.* Paul M. Angle was, for a long time, the secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association, and is now director of the Chicago Historical Society. He has written a number of books about Lincoln, among which are *Here I Have Lived,* a history of Lincoln's Springfield, and *A Hundred Years of Law;* he is the editor of the *Lincoln Reader.* Roy P. Basler, formerly Executive Secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Asso-

ciation, is professor of English at the University of Arkansas, and editor of the *Collected Works* and *Abraham Lincoln, His Speeches and Writings.*

Nevertheless, one must, in fairness to the completeness of his life and to the old friends and neighbors who knew him, believe some of the things that are recorded in the older biographies of the martyred President. Speeches and political documents can be believed, but that is not to say that they are infallible, nor need they include all of one's life. Recorded statements that we have of Abraham Lincoln tell their story. But even recorded speeches and statements have the restrictions and limitations that political occasions, the listeners present and circumstances, lay upon them. Lincoln's statements were invariably subject to these restrictions. A speech delivered to a religious body can be modified to suit the particular occasion, just as an address delivered at a political meeting can be made to fit a particular situation. Neither statement in spite of some differences, need be untruthful or hypocritical. Tales relating to the early life of Lincoln and repeated later by those who remember having known or heard him, or discussed things with him, may appear apocryphal or exaggerated or even improbable as a whole, but the kernel of truth can be there; and to throw them out on the historical ash heap is no more correct in one direction, than accepting them without question is wrong in the other.

II

In a work called *Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time*, by Robert H. Browne,[1] an alleged old friend of Lincoln's, the author tells of a visit he made in the autumn of 1862, and several times after that, to the birthplace of Mr. Lincoln. He visited Elizabethtown and Hodgenville and the Nolin Creek farm, where Lincoln had roamed as a small lad. He spoke to men and women who knew the Lincolns and who could give him pretty definite information about them. One of the informants showed the Browne party where "Lincoln was born over there on Nolin's Creek." Some other of the old settlers also pointed out to Browne that Abraham was born on Nolin's Creek. Mr. Browne makes this interesting statement: "We found it true in Kentucky, just as it was in Illinois, that those plain people who knew Lincoln or his family and its reputation, were always his most sincere friends." On this trip, the Browne party met an intelligent woman near Elizabethtown who, among other things, said something that may have been a clue to Abraham Lincoln's later behavior:

> Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham, was a real nice and agreeable man, who often got the blues, and had some strange sort of spells, and wanted to be alone all he could be, when he had them. He would walk away out on the barrens (barren spots) alone, and stay out sometimes half a day. Once when he was out there, one of my boys whom Thomas did not see, heard him talking all alone to himself about God

[1] Browne, R. H., *Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time* (Chicago: The Blakely-Oswald Ptg. Co., 1907), Vol. I, p. 82.

and His providence and sacrifices, and how there was a better and a more promised land, and a whole lot of things that my boy knew nothing about, in the Scripture. Some of us feared he was losing his mind.

Mr. Browne met Lincoln while he was studying at college in Bloomington, Illinois. Whenever Mr. Lincoln came to the city they shared a room in the establishment of Mr. Asahel Gridley, a banker-lawyer in that city. Browne claims to have gotten very friendly with Lincoln, and though yet in his teens, he followed the older man around whenever Lincoln was in Bloomington or in some towns near it. Browne apparently listened very attentively to the future president or else made notes of the conversation. He states that he learned from him that "the Bible was his first textbook, and held its place in his mind throughout all his life." We know that Lincoln was a constant and careful reader of the Bible all of his days. Browne remembers Lincoln as saying that he read and relived the Scriptures because "in them are the words of eternal life as well as the foundation of all law, rule and precept, for the welfare of government instituted by men," and he relied perfectly and complacently on the direct help and intervention of God in all human affairs.

I presume that Browne refers here to Lincoln's later years. I do not know of any authentic historical record that indicates that Lincoln "relived" the events of the Bible, particularly in his earlier years. His life in New Salem and in Springfield immediately following, if the memories of his friends that are extant are correct, certainly was far from reliving Biblical events. It may be that he tried in his early youth to imitate Elijah or John the Baptist. However, since author Browne is very proud of his relationship to Lincoln, it is probable that his high esteem exaggerated the account of his intimacy and his imagination about the Emancipator. It is this sort of thing that the editors of the *Collected Works*

tried to avoid. Nevertheless, the account does contain a modicum of truth.

Browne tells that Lincoln made the following statement concerning Paine's *Age of Reason.* It is somewhat difficult to believe it, remembering that Lincoln himself was once considered a skeptic, an infidel, a scoffer,[2] and a follower of Paine.[3] Said Lincoln, according to Browne:

> I have looked through it (the *Age of Reason*) carelessly, it is true; but there is nothing to such books. God rules this world, and out of seeming contradiction that all of these kind of reasoners seem unable to understand, He will develop and disclose this plan for man's welfare in his inscrutable way. Not all of Paine's nor all the French distempered stuff will make a man better, but worse. They might lay down tons and heaps of their reasonings alongside a few of Christ's sayings and parables, to find that he had said more for the benefit of our race in one of them, than there is in all they have written. They might read his Sermon on the Mount to learn that there is more of justice, righteousness, kindness and mercy in it than in the minds and books of all the ignorant doubters from the beginning of human knowledge.[4]

I cannot help believing that this alleged statement of Lincoln is pretty deeply dipped in Mr. Browne's own thinking; but that it contains something of the belief of Lincoln, particularly with regard to God's rule and the Sermon on the Mount, is probable. Since this is from an alleged private conversation between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Browne, we have to take it only at its face value, rather than as authenticated record.

Again an excerpt from Browne, which seems worthy of repetition: "Lincoln was one into whose soul was burned

---

[2] Basler, Roy. P., (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, pp. 382-383.

[3] Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (N. Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1926), Vol. I, p. 415.

[4] Browne, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 426.

the hope that like Moses, who was God's messenger and avenger to deliver his people from grasping and cruel bondage; he was to be the leader of a greater people from a worse and more galling bondage." [5] Another thought, also alleged to have been given in intimate conversation with General Sickles runs: "I am a full believer that God knows what he wants men to do, that which pleases Him. It is never well with the man who heeds it not. I talk to God. My mind seems relieved when I do, and a way is suggested, that if it is not a supernatural one, it is always one that comes at the time, and accords with a common-sense view of the work." [6]

Another Lincoln biography which does not receive the approval of the present day Lincoln scholars and has not been used for the "obvious reasons," is Henry E. Rankin's, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln.* This work is by a former alleged law student in the office of Lincoln and Herndon, and has been accepted as worthy of reference by Carl Sandburg,[7] but has been discredited by most Lincoln specialists.

Rankin's mother had been a dear friend of the young politician when he lived at New Salem, and he had great respect for her. Her son tells of a friendly conversation Lincoln had with her, when she asked him questions regarding his religion and his opinion of the Bible. Here is his alleged reply:

> At the time you refer to, I was having serious questionings about some portions of my former implicit faith in the Bible. In the midst of these shadows and questionings, before I could see my way clear to decide on them, there came into my life sad events and a loss that you were close to, and you know a great deal about how hard they were for me, for you

[5] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 37.
[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 195.
[7] Sandburg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Preface, p. IX; pp. 416, 417.

were at that time, a mutual friend. Those days of trouble found me tossed amidst a sea of questionings. They piled big upon me, experiences that brought with them great strains upon my emotional and mental life. Through all I groped my way until I found a stronger and higher grasp of thought, one that reached beyond this life with a clearness and satisfaction I had never known before. The Scriptures unfolded before me with a deeper and more logical appeal, through these new experiences, than anything else I could find to turn to, or ever before I had found in them. The fundamental truths reported in the Four Gospels as from the lips of Jesus Christ and that I first heard from the lips of my mother, are settled and fixed moral precepts with me. I have concluded to dismiss from my mind the debatable wrangles that once perplexed me with distractions that stirred up—but never absolutely settled anything. I have tossed them aside with the doubtful differences which divide denominations, sweeping them all out of my mind among nonessentials. I cannot without mental reservations assent to long and complicated creeds and catechisms.

Rankin says later that "this private conversation of Lincoln's as recorded here is not claimed to be in the exact words." Of course not. According to Mrs. Rankin, this meeting took place in 1846 and it was dictated to her son, Henry E. Rankin, in 1889. That is a lapse of some forty-three years and only a genius could remember even the approximately exact words. On the other hand, some of the thoughts Lincoln expressed, like the disbelief in those important "long and complicated creeds and catechisms" and his attitude towards various Christian denominations and churches, must have made an indelible impression upon the mind of a professing orthodox Christian mother. These statements without doubt contain a kernel of truth that still make sense, and are in substance confirmed by subsequent statements of Lincoln's reverence for the Bible and for religion.[8]

[8] Rankin, Henry B., *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (N. Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), p. 326.

This work, though discarded by later Lincoln specialists, confirms my judgment that such personal accounts may contain some truth. We know that Lincoln quoted the Bible, more than any President before or after him. We know from the accounts of Herndon, Lamon and Judge Henry C. Whitney, who wrote *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* and *A Life of Lincoln,* and who was for months an intimate friend of his, that Lincoln had no use for the nonessentials of religious practice and pietistic ritualism. Joshua Speed, Lincoln's first and best friend throughout his life, even spoke of him as a "skeptic." But no one except his blind and bitter enemies, ever accused him of a wanton violation of those "essentials" of the Bible which are the foundation of western society. He did "dismiss" the debatable wrangles that perplexed him with distractions and never settled anything and tossed aside the "doubtful differences which divide the denominations—the nonessentials." He never did accept "complicated creeds and catechisms." The "fundamental truths were settled and fixed precepts" with him, and this information in the Rankin narrative seems to hold water.

I think it is quite understandable now that biographical works, like those just noted, contribute to a fuller understanding of Lincoln's life. Browne and the Rankins knew him, talked with him and were his friends. Young Rankin, as has been noted, was allegedly a clerk in his office. The impression he made on them was ineradicable. Unfortunately their conversations were not recorded word by word, either by them or by him.

Another such personal record that throws some light on the religious attitude of the President, is included in the *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome,* by Father Chiniquy. This man was a French priest who lived in St. Anne, Illinois, and was involved in a suit with another French Catholic, a famous controversy in its day. One of his lawyers was Abraham Lincoln. The priest and the President maintained

their close friendship after the suit was settled, and Father Chiniquy visited Mr. Lincoln after he became President. The last time he was there was June 9, 1864, when he earnestly warned the President about the rumors of his assassination, but which Lincoln discounted.

The work of Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, is also discredited by the modern critical school of Lincoln biographers as being in the same class with Rankin's book. In the *Collected Works* there is no mention of the book so far as I have noted. This ecclesiastic gives us a vivid account of his last interview with the President and except for some statements and phrases which, it seems to me, expressed the thought of the priest rather than that of Lincoln, mirrors pretty well the ideas that must have been expressed at that sorrowful visit. When Chiniquy says that during the conversation, Lincoln said, quoting Psalm 19, "for the judgments of God are true and righteous"—we are reminded that he made this statement other times. When he quotes him as saying "is not our Christian religion the highest expression of the wisdom, mercy and love of God," we know that Lincoln may not have used the exact words, but he had expressed that idea many times. When he made a remark or its equivalent like this: "It seems to me that the Lord wants today, as he wanted in the days of Moses, another victim—a victim which He Himself had chosen, anointed and prepared for the sacrifice, by raising it above the rest of His people, I cannot conceal from you that my impression is that I am the victim," we recall from other statements by Lincoln that he looked upon himself as chosen for a divine mission which he felt crystallized itself in the liberation of the slaves. I am sure that unless Father Chiniquy took down what the President said, verbatim, he could not remember exactly what was said—but he could very well remember the tenor of the President's remarks. The visit

apparently was a very sorrowful and impressive one and, in general, it was probably fairly well recalled. I can see where the critical historians are correct in feeling that only the actual records which Lincoln left are entitled to complete historical trustworthiness, rather than those which were compiled years afterward and carry with them impressions and memories which, while they have some historical basis, cannot be assumed to be completely authentic. Yet on the other hand, it is not difficult for me to see, that from a deeply serious interview of this sort, which was their last, and which must have become to the priest a tragic memory. Father Chiniquy could have been so overwhelmingly touched, that he could have recalled more than just a hazy memory of the unforgettable meeting. The gist of the conversation surely remained with him.

In the same category of historical questionableness is an incident told by General James F. Rusling in his *Men and Things in Civil War Days.* Though not contained in the *Collected Works,* this incident is accepted by some Lincoln students, and it throws a strong light upon one of Lincoln's idiosyncrasies, namely the feeling that he had some kind of a mystical relationship with God, through prayer.

A summary of Rusling's report states: General Sickles was wounded at Gettysburg and after amputation of his leg, he was moved to Washington. When President Lincoln called upon him, General Sickles asked if the President had been anxious about the Battle of Gettysburg, and Lincoln gravely said, "No, I was not; some of my cabinet and many others in Washington were, but I had no fears."

General Sickles inquired how this was, and seemed curious about it.

Mr. Lincoln hesitated, but finally replied:

> Well, I will tell you how it was. In a pinch of your campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic-stricken, and no-

> body could tell what was going to happen, oppressed by the gravity of our affairs, I went to my room one day, and I locked the door, got down on my knees before Almighty God, and prayed to Him mightily for victory at Gettysburg. I told Him this was His war, and our cause was His cause, but we couldn't stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And then and there I made a solemn vow to Almighty God, that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg, I would stand by Him. And He did stand by you boys, and I will stand by Him. And after that (I don't know how it was, and I can't explain it) a sweet comfort crept into my soul that God Almighty had taken the whole business into His own hands and that things would go all right at Gettysburg. And that is why I had no fears about you.

Asked concerning Vicksburg, the news of whose victory had not yet reached him, he said: "I have been praying for Vicksburg also and believe our Heavenly Father is going to give us victory there too."

These statements have been attested to as being true in substance by both Generals Rusling and Sickles. There is no word of this mentioned in the *Collected Works,* because it would fall under the head of "reminiscences," and yet it is a vital link in the chain of evidence that Abraham Lincoln was a deeply religious man, and believed thoroughly in prayer. To these instances can be added a degree of mysticism attested to by his own words, which is altogether absent in the more scientific works. Whitney[9] cites the whole description of the interesting scene, and other works on Lincoln also accept it as genuine.

---

[9] Whitney, Henry C., *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), p. 326.

III

A VERY IMPORTANT ELEMENT noted in Lincoln's religion was the mystic belief illustrated by his conviction that he was chosen by the Almighty to be His instrumentality in bringing His purposes to fruition.

In a letter to Joshua Speed, his best and most intimate friend dating from the Springfield days, he wrote on July 4, 1842: "I was drawn into it [the marriage of the Speeds], as if by fate; if I would, I could not have done less than I did. I always was superstitious; as part of my superstition, I believe that God made me one of the instruments of bringing your family and you together, which union, I have no doubt, he foreordained." [1]

On his way to Washington to assume the Presidency in 1861, he delivered an address to the New Jersey Senate, February 21, in which he said, among other things: "I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be a humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle." [2]

He believed that our country was the chosen [3] example, par excellence, of government given to man; and that he

---

[1] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 289.

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 235-238.

[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 235.

was, at this juncture, the divine instrument ordained to carry out the will of God in the preservation of this government.

We have already learned from Father Chiniquy that Lincoln regarded himself as God's chosen instrument, another Moses to free a race. Moses freed white slaves—he was told to free the black race in the United States. He emphasized the "instrumentality" idea when he wrote to Mrs. Eliza Gurney on October 26, 1862: "We are indeed going through a great trial, a fiery trial. In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble servant in the hands of our heavenly Father, as I am, as we all are, to work out His great purposes, I have desired that all my work and acts may be according to His will, and that it might be so, I have sought His aid." [4]

In a letter to Reverend Byron Sunderland, who called upon the President towards the end of 1862, he said: "I hold myself in my present position and with the authority vested in me, as an instrument of Providence. I am conscious every moment that all I am and all I have, is subject to the control of a Higher Power and that Power can use me or not use me in any manner and at any time as in his wisdom and might may be pleasing to him." [5]

In a conversation with L. E. Chittenden, Lincoln's Register of the Treasury, as recorded in Chittenden's *Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration,* the President is reported to have said:

> That the Almighty does make use of human agencies and directly intervenes in human affairs, is one of the plainest evidences of his direction; so many instances when I have been controlled by some power other than my will, that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above. I frequently see my way clear to a decision when I am conscious that I have

[4] *Ibid.*, Vol. V., p. 478.

[5] Oldroyd, O. H., *Words of Lincoln* (Wash., D. C.: 1895), p. 94.

> no sufficient facts upon which to found it. But I cannot recall one instance in which I have followed my own judgment founded upon such a decision, where the results were unsatisfactory; whereas, in almost every instance where I have yielded to the views of others, I have had occasion to regret it. I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do a particular thing, He finds a way of letting me know it.

It is only on the basis of a kind of divinely induced stubbornness that one can explain Lincoln's continued association with Ward Hill Lamon, who had made himself obnoxious in the eyes of countless friends and advisers of Lincoln; or on his insistence that he must, under all circumstances, deliver his famous "House Divided Against Itself" address, which brought ultimate results opposite from those predicted by all of his friends, except Herndon. Delivered at Springfield, Illinois, in 1858, "A House Divided Against Itself" was his acceptance speech for his nomination for the United States Senate in opposition to Stephen Douglas. It has been said that this speech cost Lincoln the election. Basler says of this speech: "A greater speech had never before been delivered to an American party political gathering." [7] Yet the story is told that before delivering it, he submitted it to a number of his friends who vetoed the idea of presenting it.[8] He did give it, and it is regarded as one of the greatest contributions to American political literature.

Another instance of this intense faith of which his stubbornness was a result, was the Emancipation Proclamation, which will be considered later. Much of the material that

---

[6] Chittenden, L. E., *Recollections of President Lincoln and his Administration* (N. Y.: Harper & Bros., 1891), p. 446.

[7] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Abraham Lincoln, His Speeches and Writings* (N.Y.: World Pub. Co., 1948), p. 23.

[8] Herndon, Wm. H., *History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (N. Y.: A. & C. Boni, 1930), p. 399.

deals with these matters has not been included in the *Collected Works,* but it helps to give us phases of Lincoln's character.

In 1866, F. B. Carpenter published his *Six Months at the White House with Lincoln,* a more or less intimate account of his stay with Lincoln in 1864. He was an artist who was commissioned to paint the portrait of the President and his Cabinet. Mr. Carpenter states frankly that the book was "written in a spirit of enthusiasm and affection, a record of daily experience and observations, fragmentary, but true in all essential particulars." He describes a scene in which Colonel McKaye of New York reported to the President on his investigation of conditions of freedom in North Carolina. Those Negroes called this new leader who had freed them "Massa Linkum." Once, in the excitement of a large meeting at which someone was attempting to explain who "Massa Linkum" was, a white-headed leader arose and commanded silence. "Now you just listen to me," he said, "Massa Linkum is eberywhar. He know eberyting. He walk de earf like de Lord." Colonel McKaye told Mr. Carpenter that the President got up from his chair, walked in silence across the floor for some time, then sat down and said very impressively: "It is a momentous thing to be the instrument, under Providence, of the liberation of a race." [9]

While the President was walking the streets of Richmond, April 4, 1865, some Negroes knelt at his feet and thanked him for this deliverance. "Don't kneel to me," he said, "kneel to God only. I am but God's humble instrument; but you may rest assured that as long as I live no one shall put a shackle on your limbs, and you shall have all the rights which God has given to every other free citizen of this re-

[9] Carpenter, F. B., *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (N. Y.; Hurd and Houghton, 1866), p. 209.

public."[10] None of these incidents are in the *Collected Works.*

Lincoln believed himself to be an ordained instrument[11] of God, and that as God willed, so would the contest go. He believed in prayer and in its efficacy, and that God willed the destruction of slavery through Lincoln's instrumentality.

Barton, in the *Soul of Lincoln* writes: "He [Lincoln] profoundly believed himself an instrument of the divine will, believing that will to be right, and creation's final law." He believed in predestination and that he was foreordained to carry out that will.

[10] Oldroyd, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[11] Whitney, Henry C., *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), p. 246.

IV

THERE WAS A MYSTIC STRAIN in Lincoln's make-up that made him a victim of dreams, hallucinations and forebodings that bedevilled him. The efforts to account for this aberration have not been successful. Some have traced it to his father, Thomas. Abraham, himself, likewise had "blues" and spells of isolationism. Herndon's biography thus describes the social life of Gentryville in Abe's youth:

> Although gay, prosperous and lighthearted, these people were brimming over with superstition. It was at once their food and drink. They believed in the baneful influence of witches, pinned their faith to the curative power of wizards in dealing with sick animals, and shot the image of a witch with a silver ball to break the spell she was supposed to have over human beings. They followed with religious minuteness the directions of a water-wizard with his magic divining-rod, and the faith doctor who wrought miraculous cures by strange sounds and signals to some mysterious agency. The flight of a bird in at the window, the breath of a horse on a child's head, the crossing by a dog of a hunter's path, all betokened evil luck in store for someone; . . . fence rails could only be cut in the light of the moon and potatoes planted in the dark of the moon. . . . Surrounded by people who believed in these things (and many similar ones) Lincoln grew to manhood. From them he absorbed whatever of superstition showed itself in him thereafter. His earlier Baptist training made him a fatalist up to the day of his death, and listening in boyish wonder to the legends of some toothless old dame, led him to believe in the significance of dreams and visions.
>
> Growing from boy to man, he was alone a good deal of the time. It was the wilderness loneliness, and he lived with

trees, with the open sky, etc. Starting with his eleventh year, he had moments of great loneliness, periods of solitary thoughtfulness, spells of the "blues" and suffered from "melancholia." Among the itinerant frontier priests, who lived as Elijah, in whose exalted narrowness of devotion, all that was stern, dark and foreboding had a voice.[1]

Barton, in his *Soul of Abraham Lincoln* says: "There was superstition enough in the backwoods religion, and Abraham Lincoln never wholly divested himself of it." [2]

The more deeply one searches into Lincoln's religion, the more can one find that he was anything but logical in his religious thinking. He was, in more than one sense, a mystic. Though completely governed by the idea that God is Supreme Ruler in every aspect of national and human existence, Lincoln was frankly superstitious and believed in dreams and premonitions. He admitted this in several statements that are historic, some of which have been referred to. He never got away fully from his early life and its surroundings. We know now how greatly our early years influence our lives; and Lincoln got far from, but never entirely out of, his childhood influences. His dreams and presentiments influenced his daily living. When he writes, "I tell you Speed, our forebodings, for which you and I are rather peculiar, are all the worst sort of nonsense," [3] he was not telling a fabrication. He was exposing a trait that he had gotten

---

[1] Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (N. Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1926), Vol. I, p. 47.

Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Pub. Co., 1888), pp. 63–66.

Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N. Y.: G. H. Doran Co., 1920), p. 197.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Stephenson, N. W., *Lincoln* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1922), p. 6.

[3] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N. J., Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 280.

from both his parents and his neighbors. He told Herndon repeatedly that he had a feeling that he was "sure that he would meet some terrible end—that he would rise to great heights and then be dropped to the lowest depths." His wife told Herndon that his philosophy was, "that which is to be, will be," and no prayers of ours can reverse the decree.[4] He took his son Bob to Terre Haute, Indiana, to be cured of the bite of a rabid dog by the "mad-stone" there. At times he thought of his election as President, then became gloomy, when he was possessed by the obsession that he would fall from the heights. On June 9, 1863, while he was in Philadelphia, he telegraphed his wife that he had "had a disturbing dream about Tad," and asked his wife "to put Tad's pistol away." [5] Some time before this, April 16, 1848, he had written to his wife that he "did not get rid of the impression of that foolish dream about dear Bobby till I got your letter written the same day." [6]

Lamon tells of Lincoln's recitation "of an ominous incident, of mysterious character" that occurred just after his election in 1860: It was the double image of himself in a looking-glass which he faced while lying on a lounge in Springfield. As he looked into the glass, one of the faces showed him in full health and with happy mien. The other was pale and ghostly. Lincoln was frightened, and tried again and again later to see whether lying on a couch in the same position, he could get a repetition of the double image —one of health and happiness, the other of pallor and ghostliness. Although he had tried to reproduce this image in his home and succeeded, he never could reproduce it in the White House. It worried him and he began to have the illusion that the optimistic image indicated that he would live through the first term, while the other meant that he would

[4] Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 436.
[5] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 256.
[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 466.

not finish the second.[7] Mr. Lincoln believed that this experience in his home was indicative of the fate that awaited him later.[8]

Lamon cites another vision which troubled Lincoln very much. It took place a few days before his assassination. Lamon says that he gives this account "as nearly in his own words as I can from notes which I made immediately after its recital. There were only two or three persons present." Mr. Lincoln, at the time, had been looking very melancholy and had been silent for some time. Mrs. Lincoln remarked about his sad visage and want of spirit. This seemed to arouse him, and without seeming to notice her sally, he said, in slow and measured tones: "It seems strange how much there is in the Bible about dreams. There are, I think, some sixteen chapters in the Old Testament and four or five in the New, in which dreams are mentioned; and there are many other passages scattered throughout the Book which refer to visions. If we believe the Bible, we must accept the fact that in the old days God and His angels came to men in their sleep and made themselves known in dreams. Nowadays dreams are regarded as very foolish, and are seldom told, except by old women and by young men and maidens in love."

Mrs. Lincoln remarked that Lincoln looked so troubled and asked him whether he believed in dreams. He told her what was perhaps the most horrible dream or vision he had ever had. "I can't say that I do," replied Mr. Lincoln, "but I had one the other night which has haunted me ever since. After it occurred, the first time I opened the Bible, strange as it may appear, it was at the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, which relates the wonderful dream Jacob had. I

---

[7] Lamon, Ward Hill, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865* (Wash., D. C., 1911), p. 112.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

turned to other passages and seemed to encounter a dream or vision wherever I looked. I kept turning the leaf of the old Book, and everywhere my eye fell upon passages recording matters strangely in keeping with my own thoughts—supernatural visitations, dreams, visions, etc."

He now looked so serious and disturbed that Mrs. Lincoln exclaimed: "You frighten me! What is the matter?"

"I am afraid," said Mr. Lincoln, observing the effect his words had upon his wife, "that I have done wrong to mention the subject at all; but somehow the thing has got possession of me, and, like Banquo's ghost, it will not go down." Mrs. Lincoln then asked him to relate the dream.

"About ten days ago," said he, according to Lamon, "I retired very late. I had been up waiting for important dispatches from the front. I could not have been long in bed when I fell into a slumber, for I was weary. I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. I went from room to room; no living person was in sight, but the same mournful sounds of distress met me as I passed along. It was light in all the rooms; every object was familiar to me; but where were all the people who were grieving as if their hearts would break? I was puzzled and alarmed. What could be the meaning of all this? Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking, I kept on until I arrived at the East Room, which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully.

'Who is dead in the White House,' I demanded of one of the soldiers. 'The president,' was his answer, 'he was killed by an assassin.' Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd, which woke me from my dream. I slept no more that night; and although it was only a dream, I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since." He then became serious and said: "Well, let it go—I think the Lord in His own good time will work things out all right. God knows what is best."

Mr. Lincoln had another remarkable dream which he related: he frequently spoke of this one at the White House. It was a pleasing dream and always came to him, he said "as an omen of Union victory; it came with unerring certainty just before every military or naval engagement where our armies were crowned with success." In this dream he saw a ship sailing away rapidly, badly damaged, and our victorious ships in close pursuit. In a battle on land, he saw in this dream the close of a battle, the enemy routed, and our forces in possession of vantage ground of incalculable importance. Lincoln stated it as a fact that he had this dream just before the battles of Antietam, Gettysburg and other single engagements during the war. This was the dream referred to on the morning of Lincoln's assassination.[9]

In a conversation with General Grant, the President asked him if he had any news from General Sherman who was then engaged in battle. Grant said he hadn't, but he expected to hear soon. The President answered, "We shall hear very soon, and the news will be important." [10] General Grant asked him why he thought so. "Because," said Mr. Lincoln, "I had a dream last night and ever since this war began I have had the same dream just before every event of great national importance. It indicates that some important event will happen very soon."

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 118.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

On the night of the assassination, April 14, 1865, Mrs. Lincoln's exclamation was: "His dream was prophetic."

It will be remembered that after the battle of Antietam, when the rebel forces were driven out of Maryland and the Union positions eased considerably, the President called a meeting of the Cabinet on September 22, 1862, and according to the account of Secretary Welles,[11] the following episode took place. The subject discussed was the proclamation for emancipating the slaves and the discussion was long and earnest. Lincoln had decided to issue the proclamation which he had prepared. He had determined, when the rebel army was at Fredericksburg, to issue the proclamation of emancipation as soon as the rebel army was driven out of Maryland, whether the cabinet agreed or not. The time had now arrived. His mind was made up. The occasion for the enunciation of the policy of emancipation could no longer be delayed. Not only would "public sentiment sustain it but," and then with the certainty that his naive but deep faith inspired, he said, "I made a solemn vow before God that if General Lee was driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom for the slaves." [12] During the discussion in the Cabinet that day, Lincoln said that, "if God gave us victory," he would consider it an indication of Divine will, and that, it was his "duty to move forward in the cause of emancipation." [13] In spite of the discouragement and even the opposition of some members of the Cabinet, he did. So far as I can find, Lincoln never broke a vow which he made to God.

---

[11] "Diary of Gideon Welles," *Atlantic Monthly*, 1909, p. 369.

[12] Carpenter, F. B., *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (N. Y.: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), p. 209.

[13] Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (N. Y.: The Century Co., 1890), Vol. VI, p. 160.

Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 433.

Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

V

At the age of twenty-eight, Lincoln wrote a letter to Mary Owens in which he said, "I've never been to church yet, nor probably shall not soon. I stay away because I am conscious I should not know how to behave myself." [1] But all of this changed later. After he married, his wife became a church attendant and later affiliated with a church in Springfield which her husband often attended with her, though he never joined himself.

To many, this nonaffiliation would indicate that Lincoln was not a religious individual. But in the larger and more universal sense, Lincoln was a deeply religious man. He did believe in the Fatherhood of God, in the Brotherhood of Man, in an overruling Providence that directs the destinies of men and nations, and in the efficacy of prayers which do not conflict with the order of natural laws.[2] Lincoln was a fatalist, and believed that since the Almighty controlled the affairs of man, man could succeed only with the help of God, and without this, he would fail.[3] But he always believed in the triumph of right and the conquest over wrong; in the permanence of justice and truth.[4] If anything seemed untrue to him, he simply could not simulate truth. He had a keen

---

[1] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 78.

[2] Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Pub. Co., 1888), p. 444.

[3] Whitney, Henry C., *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), p. 245.

[4] Herndon, *op. cit., p.* 538.

sense of justice and struggled for it, whether he fought for a client in court or its maintenance during the Presidency. Writing to Joshua Giddings, his friend, May 21, 1860, he said: "May the Almighty grant that the cause of truth, justice and humanity, shall in no wise suffer at my hands." [5] He believed in the justice of the American people, and that "God's eternal truth and justice will be on our side." [6]

In a book by R. M. Wanamaker called *The Voice of Lincoln,* we find this story: "After Lincoln had written his famous 'A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Endure' speech in June, 1858, he called in a few friends to get their impression of it. Some of them condemned it as an untimely political document and wanted him to wait before he gave it to the world. This is what Lincoln is purported to have said: 'This thing (of slavery) has been retarded long enough. The time has come when these sentiments should be uttered, and if it is decreed that I should go down because of this speech, then let me go down, linked to the truth. Let me die in the advocacy of what is just and right.'" [7]

To Henry L. Pierce of Boston, who had invited him to address a group at a Jefferson anniversary party in Boston, April 6, 1859, he wrote: "Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God, cannot long retain it." [8]

He scorned the kind of religion that justified its professors in piously asking God for blessings for themselves and their kind, but withholding them from the colored children of the Almighty. In a reply to the New York Workingmen's Association, he did not use the words of the

---

[5] Basler, *op. cit.,* Vol. IV, p. 51.

[6] *Ibid.,* Vol. IV, p. 260.

[7] Wanamaker, *The Voice of Lincoln* (N. Y.: C. Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 233.

[8] Basler, *op. cit.,* Vol. III, p. 275.

Prophet Malachi, "Have we not all one Father, hath not one God created us all," but he did say: "The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people of all nations, tongues and kindreds." [9]

To a woman who came to ask a favor for her husband who was a prisoner and who emphasized that he was a religious man, the President said: "You say your husband is a religious man? Tell him when you meet him, that I say I am not much of a judge of religion, but in my opinion, the religion that sets men to rebel and fight against their government, because as they think, that the government does not sufficiently help some men to eat their bread on the sweat of others men's faces, is not the sort of religion upon which people can get to heaven." [10]

In speaking of slavery, one is reminded of the great Peoria Lincoln–Douglas debate on October 16, 1854, when Lincoln answered his opponent in a long speech on the repeal of the Missouri compromise in which, among other things, he said, "I think that I shall try to show that it is wrong; wrong in its direct effect, letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska, and wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world where men can be found inclined to take it. This declared indifference, but as I must think, convert real zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. . . . Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature; opposition to it, is his love for justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely as slavery extension brings them, shocks and throes and convulsions must ceaselessly follow." [11]

[9] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 259.
[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 154.
[11] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 225, 271, 277.

"I am naturally anti-slavery," he maintained. "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills also that we of the North as well as you of the South shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God." [12]

The severe logic that impelled Lincoln to be an abolitionist, is shown in the following example of his reasoning:

> If A proves, however conclusively, that he may be of right, enslave B, why may not B snatch the same argument, and prove equally, that he may enslave A? You say A is white and B is black. Is it color, then the lighter, having the right to enslave the darker? By this rule, you are to be slave to the first men you meet with a fairer skin than your own. You do not mean color exactly? You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to your own. But, say you, it is a question of interest; and if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.[13]

In the Peoria Lincoln-Douglas debate, held on October 18, 1854, Lincoln said in the course of his reply:

> Senator Douglas remarked, in substance, that he had always considered this government was made for the white people and not for the Negroes. Why, in point of mere fact, I think so too. But in this remark of the Judge's there is a significance, which I think is the key to the great mistake (if there is any such mistake) which he made in his Nebraska measure. It shows that the Judge has no vivid impression that the Negro is human; and consequently has no idea that there can be any moral question in legislating about him. . . . The

[12] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 282.
[13] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 223.

great mass of mankind take a totally different view. They consider slavery a great moral wrong; and their feeling against it is not evanescent but eternal. It lies at the very foundation of their sense of justice; it cannot be trifled with.[14]

In a speech on March 17, 1865, he said: "I have always thought that all men should be free; but if any should be slaves, it should be first, those who desire it for themselves; and secondly, those who desire it for others. Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally." [15]

"I hold," said Lincoln in his Quincy debate with Douglas, October 13, 1858, "that there is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence—the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as is the white man; . . . in the right to eat the bread without leave of anyone else which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas and the equal of every other man." [16]

[14] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 281.
[15] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 361.
[16] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 349.

VI

THESE EMOTION-LADEN, heartfelt pleas for justice are not just the superficial sentiments of an advocate of the principle that all men be treated justly. Perhaps a great war had to be fought for these ideas, as of course it was. Much blood would have to be shed—and the shedding of this blood would become the responsibility not only of the South, but also of the North. One can almost feel the intensity of Lincoln's emotion and pious trust, like that of the prophets, in the justice and mercifulness of God.

Lincoln could protest more strongly against the outrages heaped upon the Negroes, such as he remembered seeing in New Orleans, because he was familiar with the burning words of Amos, directed against those "who oppress the poor, crush the needy, turn justice into wormwood and cast righteousness to the ground." [1]

"What natural right," asks Lincoln, "requires Kansas and Nebraska to be opened to slavery? Is not slavery granted to be, in the abstract, a gross outrage on the law of nature? Have not all civilized nations, our own among them, made the slave trade capital, and classed it with piracy and murder? Is it not held to be the great wrong of the world? Shall that institution, which carries a rot and murrain in it, claim any right, by the law of nature to stand by the side of Freedom, on a soil that is free?" [2]

In the Peoria speech, October 16, 1854, Lincoln asks: "Is

[1] Amos 5:7.

[2] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. II, p. 245.

there not danger to liberty itself, in discarding the earliest practice (the principles of progress and the noblest political system the world ever saw) and first precept of our ancient faith? In our greedy chase to make profit of the Negro, let us beware, lest we cancel and tear to pieces even the white man's charter of freedom." [3] It is in this same speech that he announces, ". . . that there can be no moral right in the enslaving of one man by another, without his consent." [4]

To prosper and build "houses of hewn stone, and plant pleasant vineyards and drink wine in them," [5] and enjoy luxury at the expense of human slavery was not, in Lincoln's mind, the goal of our country. Defending his speech of June 15, at Springfield, which was criticized by some friends, he said: "If it must be that I must go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth, and die in the advocacy of what is right and just. This nation cannot live on injustice." [6]

And surely he was in harmony with the sentiment expressed by Prophet Amos [7] when he said: "I hate your feasts and I detest your religious assemblies; I don't want your prayers and sacrifices, your sacred music and your fine choirs, but let justice run as water and righteousness like a mighty stream." This is a slight modernization. The prophet meant that if there were no truth and sincerity at the basis of the ritualistic practices, they had no meaning and were acts of hypocrisy; and Lincoln agreed with this. In reply to a resolution by the American Baptist Home Mission Society he said: "To read in the Bible, as the word of God himself, that 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' and to

[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 276.
[4] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 266.
[5] Amos 5:11.
[6] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 61.
Oldroyd, O. H., *Words of Lincoln* (Wash., D.C.: 1895), p. 28.
[7] Amos 9:23-24.

preach therefrom that 'in the sweat of other men's faces shalt thou eat bread' to my mind, can scarcely be reconciled with honest sincerity." [8]

Lincoln's passion for justice to the Negro was not a late acquisition. Though in his earlier political life he was satisfied with the institution of slavery if it did not spread beyond the established slave states, he harbored the greatest disgust for the institution. One recalls his visit to New Orleans as a youth, when he first came in contact with slavery activities. Some later historians have rejected this story, as told by Herndon: In New Orleans, for the first time, Lincoln beheld the true horrors of human slavery. He saw Negroes in chains, whipped and scourged. Against this brutality his sense of right and justice rebelled. One morning in their rambles over the city, he and his friends passed a slave auction. A vigorous and comely mulatto girl was being sold. She underwent a thorough examination at the hands of the bidders; they pinched her flesh and made her trot up and down the room like a horse, to show how she moved, and in order, as the auctioneer said, "that bidders might satisfy themselves whether the article they were offering to buy, was sound or not." The whole thing was so revolting that Lincoln moved away from the scene with a deep feeling of "unconquerable hate." Bidding his companions follow him, he said, "By God, boys, let's get away from this. If ever I get a chance to hit that thing [meaning slavery] I'll hit it hard." "This incident," says Herndon, "was furnished me in 1865 by John Hanks. I have also heard Mr. Lincoln refer to it himself." [9]

In his meanderings in New Orleans, Lincoln saw signs reading, "I will at all times pay the highest cash prices for

[8] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 368.

[9] Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Pub. Co., 1888), p. 76.

Negroes of every description, and will also attend to the sale of Negroes on commission, having a jail and a yard fitted up expressly for boarding them." Another read like this: "For sale, several likely girls from 10 to 18 years old; a woman 24; a very valuable woman 25, with three very likely children."

It was after this visit that he really became embittered at the slave trade. It was some years after that he wrote one of the finest sentiments in the whole range of Lincoln letters. It was in a letter addressed to his old friend Joshua Speed, and bears the date of August 24, 1855. "I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of Negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it 'all men are created equal except Negroes.' When Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal except Negroes, foreigners and Catholics.' When it comes to this, I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy." [10]

[10] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 323.

VII

In reply to some slanderers Lincoln said: "That I am not a member of any Christian church, is true. But I never denied the truth of the Scriptures." [1]

That he was not a Christian in the traditional sense has never been denied, though Barton tried desperately to make him one. Lamon says that Lincoln "never told anyone that he accepted Jesus as the Christ, or as the one who performed a single one of the acts which necessarily follow upon such a conviction. Never in all the time did he let fall from his lips or pen, an expression which remotely implied the slightest faith in Jesus as the son of God and the Savior of men." [2] Lamon maintained further "that indefinite expressions about 'Divine Providence' the 'justice of God,' 'the favor of the Mighty High' were easy, and not inconsistent with his religious notions." In these, accordingly, he indulged freely.

This statement is borne out by all the authenticated writings of Lincoln. The book of Father Chiniquy, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, written many years after the interview mentioned in it, and which is not considered authentic, states that among other things, Lincoln said: "But when I consider the law of justice and expiation in the death of the just, Divine Son of Mary on the Mount Calvary, I remain mute in my adoration . . . now would it not be the greatest of honors and privileges bestowed upon me, if God in His

---

[1] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 382.

[2] Lamon, Ward Hill, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1872), p. 502.

infinite love, mercy and wisdom would put me between His faithful servant Moses, and His Eternal Son, Jesus, that I might die as they did, for my nation's sake."

This statement is in the same class with that of Professor Newton Bateman of Springfield, Illinois, who averred that Lincoln told him in an intimate conversation: "I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right because I know liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God." When William Herndon challenged the truthfulness of this statement by Lincoln, Bateman did not accept the challenge.

Students of Lincoln accept neither Chiniquy nor Bateman as reliable sources of Lincoln's religion. In none of his talks, not even to the church commissions which he addressed, nor in the various proclamations that he issued, does he mention "Christ the Son of God" and "the Savior of Mankind thru His death." In an obscure little volume containing some alleged prayers of Lincoln, I found the phrase "Saviour of mankind," which referred to Jesus. He used the word "Saviour" alone in his reply to Douglas[3] at Chicago, July 10, 1858, and several other places.

William Herndon states unequivocally that Lincoln did not believe in original sin, depravity of man, the Pope, the power of atonement, the infallibility of the written revelation or the truth of the miracles. According to Lincoln, everything that happened took place under the order of natural law; even the dreams and visions that he had were orderly events that took place under law.[4]

In his mind he may have undergone some subconscious changes in his religious thinking. This is entirely possible

[3] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Abraham Lincoln, His Speeches and Writings* (N.Y.: World Pub. Co., 1946), pp. 403, 446.

[4] Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Pub. Co., 1888), p. 443.

and is attested to in a conversation that he is alleged to have had with Mr. F. B. Carpenter, the artist. Carpenter became very friendly with both President and Mrs. Lincoln. In this volume, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln,* there appears the record of a conversation between the President and Mr. Noah Brooks, who was to be one of his secretaries, in which Mr. Lincoln said that "his own election to office, and the crisis immediately following, influentially determined him" in what he called a "process of crystallization" then going on in his mind. He probably referred not only to his election, but also to the death of his little son Willie, and to the irritating events going on nationally.[5] The "crystallization" might already have been taking place when he made his farewell speech at Springfield, in which he said, among other things: "Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him [Washington] I cannot succeed. Trusting in Him, who can go with me, and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell." [6]

Lincoln believed in the efficacy of prayer. Now and then, he cited instances which proved to him the truth of prayer, and he prayed and asked others to pray for him innumerable times. His childhood and boyhood training that God hears and answers prayers, was probably suppressed in those earlier years to which Herndon, Lamon and other of his friends refer as the years of "skepticism" or even "infidelism"; but earnest trust in communion with God came to

---

[5] Carpenter, F. B., *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), p. 189.

Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1939), Vol. III, p. 381.

[6] Basler, *Collected Works, op. cit.,* Vol. IV, p. 190.

Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (N.Y.: The Century Co., 1890), Vol. III, p. 291.

the fore again later, and remained until the day of his death one of the most important articles of his religion. If for the first five years of the war the prayers of himself and millions seemed to be unanswered, his unshakable trust that God would some day hear and answer, steadied him and gave him strength and courage. In the *Lincoln Scrapbook*, Library of Congress, Reverend N. W. Miner, of Springfield, Illinois, tells of the following incident: He and his wife had been good friends of President and Mrs. Lincoln, and they made it a point to go to Washington and, of course, visit the Lincolns in April, 1862, after the death of the President's son, Willie, and the Battle of Shiloh, when the President felt greatly depressed and discouraged. Mr. Miner said: "Well, Mr. Lincoln, you have this encouragement: Christian people all over the country are praying for you as they never prayed for mortal man before." He replied: "I believe that, and this has been the encouraging thought for me. If I were not sustained by the prayers of God's people, I could not endure the constant pressure." If I interpret this remark correctly, Lincoln felt that prayers to God and trust in Him, gave him the strength to carry on. A number of requests for prayers by the President are recorded. No one has ever raised any doubt about his faith in prayers—particularly after his election to the Presidency.

In May, 1862, he welcomed the representatives of the Lutheran Church and said among other things: "You all may recollect that taking up the sword thus forced into our hands, this government appealed to the prayers of the pious and the good, and declared that it placed its whole dependence upon the favor of God. I now, humbly and reverently in your presence, reiterate the acknowledgment of that dependence, not doubting that, if it shall please the Divine Being who determines the destinies of nations that this shall remain a united people, they will humbly seek Divine guid-

ance, make their prolonged existence a source of new benefits to themselves and their successors, and to all classes and conditions of mankind." [7]

J. G. Holland, who wrote one of the earliest biographies of Lincoln, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* in 1865, relates that a group of the Christian Commission, which sponsored religious services in the army, visited the President in Washington, and one of the ministers told how universal were the prayers of the Christian people, that even children were taught to pray for the President in their morning and evening prayers. Mr. Lincoln responded that, "If it were not for my firm belief in an overruling Providence, it would be difficult for me in the midst of such complications of affairs to keep my reason on its seat. But I am confident that the Almighty has His plans and will work them out, and whether we see it or not, they will be the wisest and best for us. I always have taken counsel of Him, and referred to Him my plans, and have never adopted a course of proceeding without being assured, as far as I could, of His approbation." [8]

I don't know whether these were the exact words of Mr. Lincoln or not. But that same sentiment had been expressed to Reverend N. W. Miner, as noted above, and no doubt was in the mind of Lincoln. That complete and limitless faith which he had in Providence was no less intense than that of the greatest prophets and the most pious Psalmists.

In June, 1862, Congressman James F. Wilson of Iowa brought a delegation to the President to ask for a firmer policy in the conduct of the war. In his talk, Mr. Lincoln said, among other things:

> But I also believe that He will compel us to do right in order that He may do these things, not so much because we desire

[7] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, pp. 212, 213.

[8] Holland, J. G., *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, Mass.: G. Bill, 1866), pp. 400, 440.

them, as they accord with His plans of dealing with this nation, in the midst of which He means to establish justice. I think He means that we shall do more than we have yet done in furtherance of His plans, and He will open the way for our doing it. I have felt His hand upon me in great trials and submitted to His guidance, and I trust that as He shall further open the way, I will be ready to walk therein, relying on His help and trusting in His goodness and wisdom.[9]

In answer to a letter from the Society of Friends of Iowa, expressing "their solicitude in the present perilous condition of the nation," Lincoln wrote:

It is most cheering and encouraging for me to know that in the efforts which I have made and am making for the restoration of a righteous peace in our country, I am upheld and sustained by the good wishes and prayers of God's people. No one is more deeply than myself, aware, that without His favor our highest wisdom is but foolishness and that our most strenuous efforts would avail nothing in the shadow of His displeasure. I am conscious of no desire for my country's welfare, that is not in consonance with His will, and of no plan upon which we may not ask His blessing. It seems to me that if there be one subject upon which all good men may unitedly agree, it is imploring the gracious favor of the God of Nations upon the struggles our people are making for the preservation of their precious birthright of civil and religious liberty.[10]

In October, 1863, the Baltimore Presbyterian Synod called on the President. The moderator told Lincoln that the Synod wished to pay its respects to him, that each member "belonged to the Kingdom of God and each was loyal to the Government."

Here is a portion of the President's reply:

I saw upon taking my position here that I was going to have an administration, if an administration at all, of extraordinary difficulty. It was, without exception, a time of the

[9] Sandburg, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 380.
[10] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 39.

greatest difficulty that this country ever saw. I was early brought to a living reflection that nothing in my power whatever, would succeed without the direct assistance of the Almighty. . . . I have often wished that I was a more devout man than I am.

Nevertheless amid the greatest difficulties of my administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place my whole reliance in God, knowing that all would go well, and that He would decide for the right. . . . I thank you gentlemen, in the name of the common Father for this expression of your respect. I cannot say more.[11]

There are many more examples of this sublime and prophetic faith of Lincoln in the righteousness of God. It was out of this supreme righteousness that Lincoln derived the principle of justice for which he so eloquently pleaded throughout his life. As he grew older, this belief in both what he called "righteousness" and "justice" became more and more intense. Even while practicing law, Judge David Davis, who later became a Justice of the United States Supreme Court, said: "He hated wrong and oppression everywhere; and many a man whose fraudulent conduct was undergoing review in a court of justice, has writhed under his terrific indignation and rebuke."

F. B. Carpenter says: "I believe no man had a more abiding sense of his dependence on God, or faith in the Divine government, and in the power and ultimate triumph of Truth and Right in the world." [12]

In that magnificent Cooper Institute Address in New York February 27, 1860, which won the friendship and admiration of a skeptical East for Lincoln, he came to this climax: "Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government, nor of dungeons to our-

[11] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 535.
[12] Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

selves. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." [13]

There are many more examples of the sublime faith that Lincoln had in the righteousness and justice of God, and in the conquest of that kind of conduct which seemed to him to stem from the Divine. He was stubborn about his insistence that what was right, was of God, and that human beings were apt to mistake this. To him what man thought was right was not necessarily so. During a conversation with a group of ministers who visited him, one of them said, "Let us have faith, Mr. President, that the Lord is on our side." Whereupon Mr. Lincoln replied, "I am not at all concerned about that, for I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right; but it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation may be on the Lord's side." [14]

During the dark days before Chancellorsville in 1863, Mrs. Lincoln arranged some spiritualistic seances in her apartment. According to Mrs. Nettie Colburn Maynard who was the medium, and who later, in 1891, published a book entitled, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?*, Mrs. Lincoln brought Mr. Lincoln to one of these. During the trance of the medium, the spirit summoned by her informed the President that the battle would not be disastrous to the Union, and that though it might not be a decisive victory, it would be a gain, not a loss to the Union. Mr. Lincoln is alleged to have "brightened visibly under the assurance given."

Barton mentions another medium, a Mrs. Grace Garrett Durand, who in a privately printed book says: "President Lincoln himself told me in many conversations I had with him from the spirit world, that he was directed in his great

[13] Basler, *Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings*, p. 536.

[14] Lamon, Ward Hill, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865* (Wash., D.C., 1911), p. 91.

work during the Civil War by his mother and others in the spirit world." [15] He also states that "during Mr. Lincoln's occupancy of the White House, there were several rumors to the effect that the President and Mrs. Lincoln were both spiritualists." Sandburg mentions the name of another medium with whom Mrs. Lincoln was acquainted. There was a feeling that Lincoln was interested in spiritualism because of what Sandburg calls "his own curiosity about the psychic-phenomena manipulators. He was possessed of a curious, inquiring nature, and according to some reports, he indulged in sportive comments about the spirits." [16]

There was also an attitude of seriousness toward spirtualism, especially at times of crises; and when a medium reported "that things would be well" Lincoln listened, believed, and supposedly was relieved. That he attended these affairs more than once is pretty good evidence that he had some curiosity about, if not actually faith in, spiritualism. If it is true that Mrs. Lincoln's greatest number of contacts with mediums occurred in 1862-1863, it could be true that Lincoln's feelings about the timeliness of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the "sweet comfort that came into his soul" which he mentioned to General Sickles about the time of Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg and Vicksburg—all of which came during or after the spiritualistic assemblies, had some mystic effect on Lincoln's feelings. Incidentally, it was alleged by Mrs. Maynard that General Sickles also attended a seance. This point about the President and spiritualism might offer an explanation to those who have wondered about the Sickles story.

Lincoln sought comfort and peace in prayer, and in the contemplation of the contents of the Scriptures. These he knew well and quoted from them more than any previous

---

[15] Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: G.H. Doran Co., 1920), p. 232.

[16] Sandburg, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 345, 346.

President. In moments of depression he turned to the Bible as his companion and guiding light.[17] He knew the Bible well and must have been familiar with the story of the Witch of Endor, in which King Saul consulted the witch, contrary to biblical law, to inquire about the outcome of the battle with the Philistines. The spirit of Samuel was conjured up and informed King Saul that he would lose both the battle and the crown. Could it possibly have been that Lincoln listened to Mrs. Lincoln's spiritualist medium, just as had Saul in the ancient days?

Isaac N. Arnold, one of the more reliable biographers of Lincoln, states that there is a traditional story that on a visit to New Orleans Lincoln and his companion John Hanks visited an old fortune teller, a voodoo Negress. Tradition says that during the interview she became very excited, and after various predictions exclaimed: "You will be President and all Negroes will be free." [18] Mr. Arnold believed that "the prophecy of the freedom of the slaves requires confirmation." He wrote to Herndon inquiring whether he had heard that story. Here is part of Herndon's reply: "It seems to be just now that I once heard of the fortune-telling story, but cannot state when I heard it, nor from whom I heard it. It seems that John Hanks who was with Lincoln at New Orleans in 1831, told me the story. I do not affirm anything or deny anything."

Lamon makes this interesting observation: "Lincoln was no dabbler in divination, astrology, horoscopy, prophecy, ghostly lore, or witcheries of any sort. The moving power of dreams and visions of an extraordinary character, he ascribed as did the Patriarchs of old, to the Almighty Intelligence that governs the universe, their process conforming

[17] Sandburg, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 370.

[18] Arnold, I. N., *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1885), p. 31.

strictly to natural laws." [19] I have already called attention to the remark he made to Lamon, "If we believe the Bible, we must accept the fact that in the old days God and his angels came to men in their sleep and made themselves known in their dreams." With an attitude like this towards the Bible, it is not difficult to see that when Lincoln referred to an important passage or an incident in the Scriptures, he did more than just mention it. He believed it!

I personally am of the belief that our Holy Bible contains much that could have been left out without any damage to the inspired portions of the great book. It is a lack of critical judgment to put, for instance, the Book of Judges on the same high inspirational plane as the Book of Isaiah; or to place Acts on the same inspirational plane as the Sermon on the Mount. There are sixty-six books in Holy Writ, but not all of them have the same value for either religion or life. There are some popular editions of the Bible that omit parts of it, and one British scholar, Claude Montefiore, edited a *Bible for Home Reading* [20] that left a good deal out, without any damage to those inspirational selections that have made the Great Book the indispensable guide to life. Let me illustrate: I find no reference in the quotations of Lincoln to the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, to the Benjamite assault, to the ascension of Elijah or Jesus, to the genealogy of Jesus, to belief in the miracle of the fishes, or to other miracles. The quotations that he cites, and the large majority of his references deal with the ethical ideals that form the basis of modern religion, and with the parables that illustrate its ideals.

No matter what value one puts upon the mystic experiences of the over-burdened, superstitious, dream-oppressed,

---

[19] Lamon, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[20] Montefiore, Claude, *The Bible for Home Reading* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1905).

vision-seeing, and praying President, one thing is definitely and completely certain: in his conduct as a person and as head of the nation, he was so possessed with the prophetic faith in God and its application to the United States, that even his mental idiosyncracies were made, wherever at all possible, to serve the higher ethical needs of the individual and nation. The dreams that agitated him most were those that concerned him as President, and the prayers that he uttered and asked for were prayers for the nation and for himself whom God had chosen as His instrumentality in preserving it. Most of his Biblical quotations were chosen to illustrate his faith in God and His justice and righteousness, and in the salvation that would finally come to our country, if it be true to the prophetic ideals which were the primary sources of his religious inspiration.

There was more to the use of the Holy Writ by Lincoln than just quoting it. The essential principles of Lincoln's religious beliefs, his ethical ideals, and his spiritual insights were grounded in the contributions of the great ethical way-showers, and these had an all-powerful influence upon him. Indeed, they were actually the patterns of his social relationships, particularly in his later life. His unshakable faith in God, his measureless trust in the rightness of his cause because he felt that it was God's cause, his complete dedication to that which he believed was God's will, and his all-pervading confidence in the ultimate victory of right and justice—all of these are strikingly reminiscent of the prophets. Anyone familiar with the great personalities of the Bible, with their spiritual yearnings, their visions, their aspirations, and their goals, must be struck by the similarity of the President's national aspirations and personal beliefs, and by the prophetic influence upon his great soul.

VIII

IT IS NOT DIFFICULT to see how his constant reading and study of the Bible would almost inevitably result in the creation of a way of life or a philosophy of life, best described by the word "religious." The word itself has no universally accepted definition. One student states that he has counted no less than one hundred and twenty definitions of the word "religion." The Prophet Micah has given us his formula: "It hath been told thee O man, what is good and what the Lord requireth of thee, to do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God." The other was the restatement by Jesus of the Old Testament teachings, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We have Lincoln's statement that these two ideals—love of God and love of man, were a part of the very foundation of his religion; but they did not encompass all of it.

In discussing the religion of Lincoln, one must exclude the area of ritualism and pageantry. He simply would not accept ritualistic regimentation. This was no doubt due to the influence of his early training in the backwoods of Kentucky and Indiana. In addition to this early influence, his very disposition and temperament operated to exclude the esthetic, ritually mystical, formal, ceremonial, and sometimes romantic trimmings that form so important a part of ritualistic religions. In his *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln,* Henry Clay Whitney, the lawyer from Urbana, Illinois, who traveled the Eighth Judicial Circuit with Lincoln, and became intimately acquainted with him in the years 1854-1861,

has something to say about Lincoln's religion. They had become intimate friends, insofar as Lincoln permitted intimacy, and Whitney observed Lincoln's habits, thoughts, and behavior. Lincoln was not a man of many words when it came to his private life, but Whitney was able to make some observations which were apparently correct.

In regard to the religious beliefs of Lawyer Lincoln, Mr. Whitney has this to say: "Lincoln had no regard for mere forms, manners, politeness, etiquette, official formalities, fine clothes, routine or red tape. He condemned all trappings, formalities, ceremonies, integuments, preludes and interludes, all of which play important roles in rituals, and drove right straight to the essence and marrow of the subject." [1] His philosophical, logical and pragmatic mind prevented him from formulating theological creeds containing elements that seemed to him far-fetched, restricted, unrealistic and illogical, as theological statements often are. He was born and reared in what to him was a free world, whose inhabitants should be untrammeled by dogmas, by formal theology and creeds, and by that kind of narrowness that would inhibit him from being what he thought he was and what he badly wanted to be, namely, an instrument in the hands of God, to extend His blessings to human beings, even the black ones. This he believed to be his destiny.

One of the first books that Lincoln was familiar with, if not the very first, was the Bible. He did not, as a matter of fact, have to be able to read in order to know some of it. It is not definitely known whether his mother could read well enough to make her way through the pages of the Bible, but we do know that she learned many biblical verses from the preachers whom she occasionally heard in the monthly religious meetings which the family attended, from

[1] Whitney, Henry C., *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), pp. 126, 248.

the hymns that were sung, and from Biblical texts which were read at the services. Many of these she repeated to her household in the course of domestic duties, and Lincoln learned these, as a child learns from hearing things repeated; and if tradition is to be believed, he used some of them as a youth in imitating the preachers, for the amusement of his friends.

William Barton informs us that John Hanks, a kinsman and companion of Lincoln, said of him, "He kept the Bible and Aesop's *Fables* always within reach and read them over and over again." [2]

As he grew older in years and richer in experience, faith in God and attachment to the Bible became more and more a part of his thinking and living. Both were essential to his belief and one did not exist without the other. Both formed the underpinning of his religion. One must be careful in speaking of his "religion." It is not easily definable—and to a logical mind, it presents many phases, some contradictory. But his love for the teachings of the Bible never ceased, and presented no difficulties to him.

There are a number of statements in his letters, speeches and public documents even before he became President, that testify to this fact. In a letter to Mary Speed, he wrote: "Tell your mother that I have not got her present with me but that I intend to read it regularly when I return home. I doubt that it is really, as she says, the best cure for the 'blues,' could one but take it according to the truth." [3] One wonders just what he meant by saying "could one but take it according to the truth"! To me that indicated that Lincoln meant to tell Miss Speed, and incidentally her mother, that

---

[2] Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: G.H. Doran Co., 1920), p. 47.

[3] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 261.

what others regarded as the "truth" may not be so regarded by him, and that he does not want to be understood as saying that everything in the Bible is the "truth." I believe that his language invites this interpretation.

Joshua Speed cites the following incident in his lecture, "Abraham Lincoln": "I was invited out to the Soldiers' Home to spend the night with Lincoln. As I entered the room near night, he was sitting near a window intently reading the Bible. Approaching him, I said, 'I am glad to see you so profitably engaged.' 'Yes,' said he, 'I am profitably engaged.' 'Well,' said I, 'if you have recovered from your skepticism, I am sorry to say that I have not.' Looking me earnestly in the face, and placing his hand on my shoulder, he said: 'You are wrong, Speed, take all of this Book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier man.'" [4]

When a committee of colored people from Baltimore presented the President with a Bible, September 7, 1864, he said among other things: "So far as able within my sphere, I have always acted as I believed to be right and just; and I have done all I could for the good of mankind generally. In letters and documents sent from this office I have expressed myself better than I now can. In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it, we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it." [5]

Speaking to C. E. Chittenden, the Register of the Treas-

---

[4] Speed, Joshua, "Abraham Lincoln" (lecture).
Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[5] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, p. 542.
Carpenter, F. B., *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), p. 198.

ury, Lincoln said: "Now let us treat the Bible fairly. If we had a witness on the stand whose general story we knew was true, we would believe him when he asserted facts of which we had no other evidence. We ought to treat the Bible with equal fairness. I decided a long time ago that it was less difficult to believe that the Bible was what it claimed to be, than to disbelieve it. It is a good Book for us to obey; it contains the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and many other rules which ought to be followed. No man was ever the worse for living according to the directions of the Bible." [6]

These passages show the high regard in which Abraham Lincoln held the Bible, and can well put him in the class of the bibliolaters—those who almost worship the Bible. No doubt, Lincoln had read the whole Bible—but he probably did not know it critically as well as he might have; for if he had, he could not have said what he did, since there are contradictions in the Book in spite of its greatness, and since he had shown in many ways that there were alleged supernatural phenomena in it which he did not accept.

[6] Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

IX

Lincoln, of course, did not know anything about what is called "the higher criticism of the Bible," the scientific study of the Bible and the possibility of making changes in wordage and thought which are the result of what is called "biblical research." It seems certain that if he had been acquainted with the new biblical science he would not have accepted it, or else he would not have made the extravagant statements that he did make concerning the Bible.

His attitude in regard to his belief in the Book was eclectic. He selected those teachings, doctrines, episodes, and ideals which pleased him and his philosophy. He borrowed freely from its various books and teachers. He quoted, to the largest extent, those precepts and doctrines which were friendly to his own concepts of religion, and he left out much that is deemed of greatest importance in the religion of traditional Christianity.

He knew, no doubt, that the Bible covers a period of more than a thousand years—an era in which there were many changes in the area of human thought and conduct. He realized that apart from all of this, the Bible contains eternal verities—truths which even time cannot change, and these he correctly made the fountain of his religious insights. But they cannot be reduced to a system of theology, Christian or any other kind. The best that can be said is that the President found a response to his deepest spiritual yearnings, broadened and intensified by his experience in his relationships with people, and in his dedication to that

cause which he thought best. He found these appeals in the Bible, and unmindful or ignorant of other doctrines, he accepted the part he chose, to represent the whole, and let that part be the Holy Bible. This is the only way that one can accept and implement the biblical content of Lincoln's religion, and its apparent contradictions. It has to be, so to speak, departmentalized; in one compartment he put the superb teachings of Moses, the Prophets and Jesus; in another, his dreams and visions; in another, his superstition, and in still another, his aversion to rituals, religious symbols and ecclesiastical ceremonials though founded on or derived from Scripture.

They are wrong who maintain that because he did not attach himself to any one of the religious sects that abounded in his day he was without religion, or that as some have said, "He was not a religious man." One of the statements that will be repeated as long as Lincoln's name is heard, is that which he made to Henry C. Deming, a member of Congress from Connecticut, in about 1864. When Deming asked the President why he never affiliated with a church, he received this reply:

> I have never united myself to any church, because I have found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental reservation, to the long complicated statements of Christian dogmas which characterize their articles of belief and confession of faith. When any church will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership, the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of both the law and the gospel, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself," that church will I join with all my heart and my soul.[1]

[1] Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), p. 94.

Carpenter, F.B., *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), p. 90.

Deming, H. C., Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln Delivered Before the General Assembly of Connecticut, June 8, 1865.

Lincoln believed in a righteous, just, all-wise and beneficent God, who expects his children to exercise justice and mercy to all men. This sentiment runs through every religious reference that he wrote and uttered and is particularly noticeable in his proclamations, which will be considered later.

If the younger Lincoln distressed some of his friends because of his lack of enthusiasm for abolition, the older Lincoln made up for it by striking the shackles from the limbs of the black man. The ideal of justice for the oppressed became a most luminous jewel in the breastplate of the Union, and its achievement became the outstanding passion of the President, next to the preservation of the Union. Whatever reasons some may give for the Emancipation Proclamation, its justification on the ground of justice will never be given an inferior place in the religion of Abraham Lincoln.

The strict abolitionists, those who wanted to abolish slavery at any price, were not happy with Lincoln's early stand on abolition. As a matter of fact they remembered that in March 1837, Lincoln was one of the signers of a resolution that was introduced in the Illinois Legislature, March 3, 1837, which read: "They [the signers] believe that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy; but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its evils. They believe that the Congress of the United States has no power under the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States." [2] On October 3, 1845, Lincoln wrote, in a letter to Williamson Durley, "I hold it to be a paramount duty of us in the free states, due to the Union of States, and perhaps to liberty itself (paradox though it may seem) to

[2] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 75.

let the slavery of other states alone."[3] There are other similar examples of his earlier stand. But as conditions changed, and the institution of slavery all but split the Union, Lincoln took the stand that resulted in the Emancipation Proclamation, that is, that the same justice must be meted to the Negro as to the white man.

Lincoln's religion was a unique blending of reverence for the Bible, faith in God, belief in prayer, ethical idealism, moral stamina, a mystic approach to dreams and presentiments, anti-ritualism, and in the reality of communication with God through prayer. He believed in revelation, in the actuality of a Divine Providence, in the ethics of the prophets including Moses and Jesus, and in a fixed Divine purpose. Mankind was the agency which carried out God's purposes, and the best guide for helping man to do so were the Scriptures. In his earlier years he was an unbeliever and at best a doubter, but age and experience replaced these with a deep and an ineradicable faith both in God and in His word.

Jesse W. Fell was a Bloomington, Illinois, lawyer and a very dear and close friend of Lincoln. He was a chief advocate of Lincoln for the presidency, and a friend in whom Lincoln had utmost confidence. He was one of the few men with whom Abraham Lincoln discussed religion.

Fell had no ax to grind, but wrote in September 1870, what he believed to be the truth. The most important paragraphs from his statement support the theory set forth in this study:

> On the innate depravity of man, the character and office of the great Head of the Church, the atonement, the infallibility of the written revelation, the performance of miracles, the nature and design of present and future rewards and punishments (as they are popularly called) and many other subjects, he held opinions utterly at variance with what are

[3] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 47.

usually taught in the church. I should say that his expressed views on these and kindred topics were such as, in the estimation of most believers, would place him entirely outside the Christian pale. Yet, to my mind, such was not the true position, since his principles and practices and the spirit of his whole life were of the very kind we universally agree to call Christian; and I think this conclusion is in no wise affected by the circumstances that he never attached himself to any religious society whatever. His religious views were eminently practical, and are summed up as I think in these two propositions: The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He fully believed in a superintending and overruling Providence, that guides and controls the operations of the world; but maintained that law and order, and not their violation or suspension, are the appointed means by which this providence was exercised.[4]

Nicolay and Hay, the two top secretaries of Lincoln, found a document which Lincoln had written and put away, and which turned out to be a meditation upon the course of the war, in its relation to the will of God. Up to the time of the publication of the *Abraham Lincoln: a History* by these officials in 1890, it had not been known, although according to them, it was written near the end of September, 1862. His mind was then burdened with the weightiest questions of his life, and the most serious for our country. Nicolay and Hay wrote: "Wearied with all the considerations of the law and the expediency with which he had been struggling for two years, he retired within himself and tried to bring some order into his thoughts by rising above the wrangling of men and parties, and pondering the relations of human government to the Divine. In this frame of mind, absolutely detached from any earthly considerations, he

[4] Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Pub. Co., 1888) pp. 442-446.

Lamon, Ward Hill, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1872), p. 490.

Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1926), Vol. I, p. 415.

wrote this meditation, which had never been published. It was penned in the awful sincerity of a perfectly honest soul trying to bring itself into closer communion with its Maker." [5] This is the profound foreword to as moving a religious contemplation as one finds in the Bible. Lincoln wrote:

> The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purposes of either party;—and yet the human instrumentalities working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true;—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By His mere great power on the minds of the now contestants, He could either have saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun, He could give final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.

The meditation evidently was not finished. But one can easily detect in it the innermost thoughts of a deeply religious man torn by doubts, unwilling to succumb to them because of unshaken faith in the God of justice and righteousness. It is bitter doubting at first, but in the end, victory emerges from the struggle.

In the same vein of faith which he so often showed, he wrote to Mrs. Eliza P. Gurney on September 4, 1864: "The purposes of the Almighty are perfect and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and

[5] Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (N.Y.: The Century Co., 1890), Vol. VI, p. 342.
Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 403.

our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains." [6]

In acknowledgment of a compliment on his Second Inaugural Address he wrote to Thurlow Weed: "Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world. It is a truth which I thought needed to be told, and as whatever humiliation there is in it falls most directly on myself, I thought others might afford for me to tell it." [7]

Between the years of Jesse Fell's friendship with Lincoln, the meditation which Nicolay and Hay found, and the above sentiments, many events which tried the soul of the President had taken place. They undoubtedly influenced his religious thinking greatly. Yet on May 27, 1865, Nicolay wrote a letter to Lincoln's most intimate biographer and twenty-year law partner, W. H. Herndon, which reads: "Mr. Lincoln did not to my knowledge in any way change his religious ideas, opinions or beliefs from the time he left Springfield to the day of his death. I do not know just what they were, never having heard him explain them in detail; but I am very sure he gave no outward indication of his mind having undergone any change in that regard while here." [8]

Was there really no change? There comes to mind at this point, the statement that the President is alleged to have made to Noah Brooks. Referring to a "change of heart," the President supposedly said that he did not remember any precise time when he passed through any special change of purpose or of heart; but he would say that his own

[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 535.
[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 356.
[8] Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

election to office, and the crisis immediately following, "influentially" determined what he called a "process of crystallization" then going on in his mind.[9] It was this process of change, referred to earlier, that Nicolay did not perceive. If the information set forth here is correct, one can understand the basis of the difference between Fell's statement and the meditation, and between Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Gurney and Nicolay's to Herndon.

When a comparison between the religion of Lincoln and that of the prophets is made, one must not believe that all the prophets thought alike. There is a difference between the humble law giver Moses, and the crude and curt Elijah who was not afraid to tell his king that he was the "trouble-maker" in Israel; between Amos whose stern sense of justice runs like a silken thread throughout his oracles, and the priestly Ezekiel and the tender-hearted Hosea who reveal that the love of God is eternal, even for the sinner, if he repents and returns to his Maker; between the noble Isaiah who sounded the important principle that sincere godliness is the essence of divine worship, and Jeremiah the Man of Sorrows, who continually pleads for a national revival of right living; between Malachi who pleaded for the Brotherhood of Man in the Fatherhood of God, and Jesus who pleaded for the achievement of personal piety to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Every single one of these inspired messengers of the Holy One, like their immortal American disciple, felt themselves divinely appointed to carry out the mission for which they believed God had designated them. It is not to be wondered at then, that Abraham Lincoln, a worshipper of the God of the Bible, a believer in His mysterious ways, convinced that he was an instrument of God Almighty in carrying out certain of His purposes, would so completely

[9] Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

immerse himself in the teachings, ideals and purposes of those others to whom God had revealed Himself, and that these largely become the sources of his religious inspiration. Lincoln believed that God spoke to him, just as he did to the prophets. Lamon says: "Mr. Lincoln was by no means free from a kind of belief in the supernatural. While he rejected the great facts of Christianity, as wanting the support of authentic evidence, his mind was readily impressed with the most absurd superstitions. He lived constantly in the serious conviction that he was himself the subject of a special decree, made by some unknown and mysterious power, for which he had no name. The birth and death of Christ, his wonderful works, and his resurrection, as the 'first-fruits of them that slept,' Mr. Lincoln denied, because they seemed naturally improbable, or inconsistent with his philosophy, so called." [10]

That Lincoln believed himself as did the prophets, to be a special instrument to carry out the purpose of God, has been amply proven on these pages. But I am certain that he ascribed this "special decree" to God, and that Lamon was mistaken in his belief that Lincoln had no name for what Lamon calls "an unknown and mysterious power." This might have been so in the New Salem and early Springfield days of Lincoln's life—but it was definitely not so in his later years. "The effect of Mr. Lincoln's unbelief did not effect his constitutional love of justice. Though he rejected the New Testament as a book of divine authority, he accepted the practical part of its precepts as binding upon him by virtue of natural law. The benevolence of his impulses served to keep him, for the most part, within the limits to which a Christian is confined by the fear of God." [11]

[10] Lamon, Ward Hill, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865* (Wash., D.C., 1911), p. 115.

[11] Lamon, *op. cit.*, p. 503.

Lincoln believed in the God of the Prophets including Jesus; in a righteous, just, all-wise and beneficient God, who expects his children to exercise justice and mercy to all men, and will punish those who violate His laws. This sentiment runs through many religious references and is particularly noticeable in his proclamations, which will be considered later.

X

OTHER TENETS of Lincoln's religion—reward and punishment, repentance and forgiveness, as well as immortality, were important elements in his belief. But above all, he was a militant ethical monotheist, whose God required of His creatures that they "do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him." Lincoln certainly got his ethical teachings from the Bible, particularly from the prophets. His knowledge of them was phenomenal. Age, experience and repetition galvanized them into a precious source of idealistic inspiration for his stand that faith in God, justice and righteousness must be the foundation for the preservation of the Union. "Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulties," he said in his first inaugural address.[1]

I would agree with Herndon, Lamon, Matheny, Fell and the others, that Lincoln's religious fervor had not been apparent almost up to the time of his nomination. I would not accept Lamon's or Herndon's thesis as to his high degree of skepticism. This is in speaking of his later years not of his youth. But I am convinced that Lincoln would agree with Fell, that by the time he had to make his farewell address at Springfield, the process of "crystallization" had begun to jell, and Lincoln would willingly have subscribed himself as a "non-ritualistic Christian," with a firm faith in the Creator,

[1] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. IV, p. 271.

as is so many times indicated in his proclamations and in private interviews and letters.

It has been asserted in this book that Lincoln made the Prophets the source of his religious inspiration, and accepted their teachings. Who were these ethical giants, and what are some of their ideals that impressed themselves so indelibly upon the soul of the Emancipator?

These unique personalities, beginning with Moses and ending with Jesus, were a body of men who, upon the foundation of traditional Mosaic teachings, erected the most effective, dynamically ethical structure known to western civilization. There is no single source of ethical wisdom possessed by the western world that has so influenced and dominated our life, as has the collection of books, the Old and New Testaments, called the Bible. It is by all odds the most important factor in the development of what we call western civilization. Its influence extends into nearly every corner of the world, and more than a third of mankind looks to it as the revealed will of the Creator. If our hopes for a high human goal and the expectation of some day reaching it, are meritorious; if we have a point of view regarding the dignity and value of man that is really superior to that of the non-Christian peoples; if there is in our mode of living, a human welfare concern deeper than that of the peoples who do not direct their lives by the precepts in our Scripture; if all of this is true, then our Bible must be given credit for teaching us this noble view of life.

These Prophets from Moses to Jesus, like Lincoln, accepted their God intuitively. They did not attempt to reason out his existence philosophically, nor did they try to discover Him by research and experiment. By their testimony, God revealed Himself to them and called them; and in moments of deep thought, of serious meditation and weighty

concentration upon important problems, they felt His presence and made it what they regarded as their guide. The deeply spiritual individual gets proof of his God inwardly, emotionally, and mystically, and actually feels His presence. He accepts what he conceives to be his commission because of an ineradicable and inexplicable faith—the indication of God's Providence in the working of the individual's life. The Prophets, and in his later years, Abraham Lincoln, had just such a faith, and all of them believed in it implicitly. In the communications which the President left behind, where this faith played a part, he, like the old Hebrew masters, never tried nor sought to explain it.

Like his spiritual forbears, Lincoln decried what seemed to him to be injustice, brutality, immorality, greed, false worship, the destruction of human dignity and wrecking the nation. He pleaded for individual righteousness, human justice, national purity, universal peace, and faith in God. For all of them, these were the primary elements in a way of life that would not only preserve national unity, but the peace of mankind as well. Lincoln's philosophy of life can be summed up in ten verses from the Bible, as follows: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," from the writings of Moses.[1] "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow," from the writings of Isaiah.[2] Jeremiah says: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understands and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord who exerciseth justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these

[1] Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18.
[2] Isaiah 2:16–17.

things do I glory, saith the Lord." [3] From the prophet Ezekiel: "But if a man be just and do that which is lawful and right and hath much withdrawn from iniquity and hath executed true justice between man and man, hath walked in my statutes and kept my ordinances to deal truly, he is just and shall surely live, saith the Lord." [4] In the Book of the Prophet Hosea, we find, "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and in justice, in loving-kindness and in mercy."[5] Amos thunders: "Seek ye the Lord and ye shall live; seek good and not evil, that ye may live; hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate." [6] In Micah we find: "He hath told thee O man, what is good and what the Lord doth require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." [7] In Habakkuk we find: "The just shall live by his faith." [8] Malachi asks: "Have we not all one Father, hath not one God created us all? Why then do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" [9] And from Jesus, we get, "Woe unto the world because of offences, for it needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." [10] The quantity and the quality of Lincoln's quotations from Scripture indicate how deeply he was immersed in the prophetic way of life.

It is plain to see that he could easily have discovered in these patterns of behavior spiritual giants which appealed strongly to his religious sensibilities and buried themselves deep in his subconscious mind. His early surroundings,[11] the

[3] Jeremiah 9:22–24.
[4] Ezekiel 18:5–9.
[5] Hosea 2:22-23.
[6] Amos 5:14-15.
[7] Micah 6:8.
[8] Habakkuk 2:4.
[9] Malachi 2:10.
[10] Matthew 18:7.
[11] Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), Chap. III.

crude mode of living ,the roughness of daily existence, and an inward urgency that would preserve what to the people at that time were the commands of their religious teachers, could well have united to form a basis for a religious pattern for one who possessed a deeper spiritual insight than most of his contemporaries.

His early indifference to his personal appearance which lasted even to his early mature years; his disregard for the amenities of social usage even after marriage; his habitual retreat from friends and associates which so puzzled them; his habit of deep mental concentration; his quiet aloofness in personal relations; his fearlessness in the face of wrong; his fundamental sense of justice—all of these formed that truly religious core of his character, which though unanalyzed in his younger years, developed into that dynamic religious quality which later distinguished his activities.[12]

[12] Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Pub. Co., 1888), pp. 309, 401, 425, 427, 433.

Whitney, Henry C., *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), pp. 123, 126, 251.

XI

LINCOLN'S YOUTHFUL MIND was an active one. He remembered what he had heard at home and what he learned later, whether it was the Bible or some other book that interested him. He lived in a day when stories and superstitions were rife, and when many an Indian tale must have excited him. His own paternal grandfather was killed by Indians, and the boy certainly spun stories about heroes who committed valiant acts in their attempts to wipe out other evils, as well as the Indians. His imagination must have served him well, as he himself testifies. If he was like other boys in this respect, and there is no reason to doubt it, what fighting hero could better appeal to a young backwoodsman like Abe, than this "hairy individual, wearing a mantle of skin, fed by ravens, wild-looking and girt about his loins with a leather belt," than the mysterious, rugged, picturesquely-garbed, possessor of a deep faith himself, the Prophet Elijah! That Lincoln was impressionable is attested to by his own words. On his way to Washington after the first election, he stopped off to address the New Jersey Senate, and in the course of his remarks, he said: "May I be pardoned if upon this occasion I mention that away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book such a one as few of the younger members have seen, Weem's *Life of Washington.* I remember all the accounts there given of the battlefields and struggles for the liberties of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here in Trenton, New Jersey. You all know for you have all been boys, how those early impres-

sions last longer than any others."[1] What happened to young Lincoln in the case of Weems, could have happened when he heard his mother or the wandering preachers tell of the strange prophet, or when he himself got older and read about him. There is hardly a story of a hero anywhere, that could appeal more to a rugged, active boy than that of the hairy, raw-boned, desert man who was fed by ravens, dressed in leather pantaloons; who came to "town" to tell the king and the queen "where to get off." This kind of childish enthusiasm was demonstrated in the recent rage that the tales of Davy Crockett created among the youngsters who like to imitate a courageous and romantic hero.

In his youth Lincoln cultivated habits of mental concentration and quiet stubborness, as well as that of self-isolation in working out his personal problems, and his fearlessness in the face of what he thought was wrong. He retained these habits all of his life, and they could, in part at least, have been derived from the story of the mysterious desert-prophet, who discovered from his own experience that God does not always manifest Himself in the great wind that rends the mountain, or in the earthquake that shakes the earth nor in the fire that consumes what it hits, "but in the still small voice."[2] It was no small thing for Elijah to confront King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, one of the worst characters in Bible history, and say to him, "Thou art the troubler in Israel." It was also in moments of deep concentration and soul-searching that reached the innermost recesses of his being, that Elijah heard the voice of his God, which gave him the strength to cry out to those who were on Mt. Carmel hesitating which way to turn: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be the Lord, follow

[1] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. IV, p. 235.

[2] I Kings 17:11-13; 18:16, 20, 21.

Him; if Baal, follow him." It was this kind of soul-searching and communion with the Almighty, that enabled Lincoln to make the decision to issue his Emancipation Proclamation, in spite of the opinions of some influential leaders, even in his cabinet.[3]

The Emancipator's almost superhuman courage, his continued obstinacy and his final determination that the Union can be saved only if the slaves are freed, not half slave and half free. His unalterable decision to fulfill his promise to God if He gave the Union arms after the Fredericksburg victory; the subsequent issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, though incomprehensible to some of his associates—all point to that same high moral grandeur which lifted the prophets to ethical heights never attained before or since except possibly by Gandhi. It was on Monday, September 22, 1862, according to Mr. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, that Lincoln informed the Cabinet that "the time for the annunciation of the emancipation policy could no longer be delayed."[4] "Public sentiment," he thought, "would sustain it—many of his warmest friends and supporters demanded it—and he had promised his God that he would do it." The last part of this was uttered in a low tone, and appeared to be heard by no one but Secretary Chase, who was sitting near him. He asked the President if he correctly understood him. Mr. Lincoln replied: "I made a solemn vow before God, that if General Lee was driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves. When the Rebel army was at Frederick, I determined as soon as it should be driven

[3] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 388.
Carpenter, F. B. *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), p. 86.
Herndon, Wm. H., *Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), pp. 547-549.

[4] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 433.
Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

out of Maryland, to issue a Proclamation of Emancipation, such as I thought most likely to be useful. I said nothing to anyone, but I made the promise to myself and [hesitating a little] to my Maker. The Rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfill that promise. I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter for that I have determined myself . . ." Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles gives a similar account of the meeting that day.[5]

Lincoln knew that there was opposition to this action in and out of the Cabinet, and it was an opposition-shattering move. He knew that it might cost his life. But his mentors in the Bible had also taken such chances. Elijah was hunted by Jezebel who would have had him slain had she found him; Isaiah, according to tradition, was entombed in a tree, which was sawed in two; Jeremiah, according to a tradition, was stoned to death by a mob in Egypt because he refused to take orders from it, and Jesus was crucified by Rome, because he preached the coming of the Kingdom! It was from these teachers that Lincoln drew inspiration, courage and strength. On his way to Washington to his first inaugural, he had said: "I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and if it be the pleasure of the Almighty to die by." [6]

One who is familiar with the prophetic literature is indelibly impressed by the similar complete prophetic trust and faith which Lincoln had in God. He was as certain that God spoke to him and with him, as were the prophets. As angels came to men in their sleep, and made themselves known in their dreams and visions, as of old, so he believed God may appear to his chosen instruments today, to reveal

[5] Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), p. 283.
"Diary of Gideon Welles", I, 143; *Atlantic Monthly*, 1909, p. 369.
[6] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 241.

matters of great import; and this belief was a reason for his being so troubled by certain dreams which, to him, had some significance.[7]

Out of the mass of the literary remains of the martyred President, one thing stands out irresistibly impressive, and that is, that he was filled with the prophetic spirit of trust in God Almighty, and the will to practice justice and righteousness; a reliance upon prayer, repentance and divine forgiveness, and faith in the conservation of the dignity of the individual—all directed towards the preservation of the nation—Judea, for the Old Testament Prophets; the United States, for him. Numerous statements, particularly in the proclamations, recall biblical passages, dealing with the will of God, with national sins, with the ultimate conquest of righteousness, with the victory of justice, the return of the sinners to the Father, and the survival of a God-fearing and God-worshipping nation.

[7] Lamon, Ward Hill, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865* (Wash., D.C., 1911) p. 115.

XII

I HAVE SELECTED a number of State Papers from the Lincoln collections, because from them can one procure the evidence to prove what is claimed, namely, that he got his religious inspiration largely from the great prophetic way-showers of the Bible. In nearly all of these documents, whether letters, addresses, proclamations, or messages, the occasions which inspired their expression somewhere touch the life of the nation. Sometimes there were circumstances that evoked the most serious considerations, sometimes grateful exclamations, sometimes warnings and sometimes preachments. But wherever there was a possibility of a religious application, Lincoln emphasized the occasion, and usually, with a formulation that recalls a prophetic parallel. This is so, particularly in the proclamations and the recommendations for days of Thanksgiving, Prayer, Fasting and Repentance. It is less so in the debates and the messages to Congress which concerned general matters.

The first inaugural address of the President Lincoln, was delivered March 4, 1861. In this address, in the face of ominous shadows of a Civil War, the President sets forth the problems that face the nation, and his own deep desire to avoid any violation of the Constitution of the United States. He pleads with the whole country for the maintenance of peace, the observance of the Constitution, and the preservation of the Union. But he takes a firm stand that if there is rebellion, he will take whatever action he deems best for the preservation of the Union. He asks, "Why should

there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? If the Almighty Ruler of the nations, with His eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail, by the judgment of this great tribunal, the American people." And near the close of the address he says, "If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty." [1] Throughout this address, as is also the case in all the others and in the proclamations, there runs the steady stream of complete faith in the justice of Almighty God, which the President tried to impress upon his people.

On July 4, 1861, President Lincoln sent a special message to Congress.[2] Four months earlier, at the beginning of the Presidential term, the functions of the Federal Government were found to be generally suspended in several southern states. After a detailed survey of the whole situation, . . . since the issue embraces more than the fate of the United States"; since it ". . . presents to the whole family of man, the question whether a constitutional republic or a democracy, a government of the people, by the same people can or cannot maintain territorial integrity against its own domestic foe,"—it was decided to "call out the war power of the Government; and so to resist force employed for its destruction, by force, for its preservation." It was with the deepest sorrow that the President found it his duty to employ his war-power. He hopes "that the peoples' views will accord with his," and then realizing the tremendous serious-

[1] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. IV, p. 262.

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 421.

ness of the action, he ends the message with the prayer: "Having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts." And this reminds one strongly of the mandate to Joshua in the Book of Joshua, said to have been given by the Almighty, by God Himself, in the words, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee; I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong and of good courage for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I swore unto their fathers to give them." [3]

By the summer of 1861, conditions in the land had grown pretty serious. In the words of Bruce Catton in his *This Hallowed Ground*, "There was street fighting in the cities, governors and legislators had been driven in flight or put under arrest; earnest home guards were tramping clumsily into state capitols, and what it all meant was that secession had been accepted as revolution. There could be no compromise with it; it would be fought whenever necessary with revolutionary weapons, which in effect meant with any instrument that came to hand. The South could win its independence only by destroying the government of the United States." Congress became alarmed as did the President. There was going to be a war to the finish. Congress met, and appointed a joint committee to wait on the President. On August 12, 1861, he issued a Proclamation for a Fast Day,[4] typical and reminiscent of the appeals of the prophets to their erring countrymen in times of distress. It was in answer to the resolution of Congress, and read:

> Whereas, a joint committee of both houses of Congress has waited on the President of the United States and requested him to recommend a day of public prayer, humiliation, and fasting, to be observed by the people of the United States with religious solemnities, and the offering of fervent sup-

[3] Joshua 1:6.
[4] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 482.

plications to Almighty God for the safety and welfare of these States, His blessings on their arms and a speedy restoration of peace, and,

Whereas, it is fit and becoming in all people, at all times, to acknowledge and revere the supreme government of God; to bow in humble submission to his chastisements; to confess and deplore their sins and transgressions, in the full conviction that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and to pray with all fervency and contrition for the pardon of their past offenses, and for a blessing upon their present and prospective action: and,

Whereas, when our own beloved country, once, by the blessing of God, united and prosperous and happy, is now afflicted with faction and civil war, it is peculiarly fit for us to recognize the hand of God in this terrible visitation, and in sorrowful remembrance of our own faults and crimes as a nation and as individuals, to humble ourselves before Him and to pray for His mercy—to pray that we may be spared further punishment, though most justly deserved; that our arms may be blessed and made effectual for the re-establishment of law, order and peace throughout the wide extent of our country; . . .

Therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do appoint . . . as a day of humiliation, prayer and fasting for all people of the nation . . . in all humility and with all religious solemnity, to the end that the united prayer of the nation may ascend to the Throne of Grace, and bring down plentiful blessings upon our country.

This proclamation is reminiscent of the burdens of Jeremiah and other prophets.[5]

The President begins his message of December 3, 1861, by thanking the Almighty in these words: "In the midst of unprecedented political troubles, we have cause of great gratitude to God for unusual good health, and most abundant harvests." He goes on to mention the "disloyal portion of the American people" who have destroyed the Union. He dwells on the "disloyal citizens" who want to ruin the coun-

[5] Jeremiah 2:7-22; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Hosea 14:2-3, 5-8; Matthew 9:13; Mark 1:4, 12; Luke 13:3.

try, and have introduced dangers and difficulties; he mentions that Congress has failed to provide chaplains for hospitals, and calls attention to many matters of deepest concern for the welfare and the preservation of the country, then he ends the address with these pious words: "With a reliance on Providence, all the more firm and earnest, let us proceed in the great task which events have devolved upon us." [6] Never had he a doubt but that the Almighty would resolve the difficulties favorably!

On March 6, 1862, President Lincoln sent a message to Congress recommending the adoption of a resolution that the United States ought to cooperate with any state which may adopt the gradual abolition of slavery, giving such a state "pecuniary aid to compensate for such a change of the system." He believed that the leaders of the insurrection might entertain the hope that the Federal government would ultimately have to acknowledge its defeat. He thought that by this offer of help, some of the states would begin to initiate the emancipation of their slaves. He closes this message with these words: "In full view of my great responsibility to my God and to my country, I earnestly beg the attention of Congress and the people to the subject." [7] Completely persuaded that as God had selected him as His instrument, and his country had elected him as its leader, his duty to act was clear.

The Annual Message of December 1, 1862, to Congress, again thanks God for "a year of health and bountiful harvests." In spite of the fact that the war is still on, and there is no peace yet, "we can but press on, guided by the best light He gives us, trusting that in His own good time and wise way, all will yet be well." He speaks of the conditions that are facing the land, of the disturbed social situation, asks for the adoption of several amendments dealing with

[6] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 35.
[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 144.

the abolition of slavery, even touching an appropriation of money for colonizing free colored persons, and a number of other things. It is in this address that Lincoln tells Congress and the American people that he favors the colonization of the freed slaves. Towards the close of the address he makes this remarkable plea, which can take its place by the side of the most appealing passages of any character in the Bible: "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free, honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peace, generous, and just—a way which if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless." [8] Words like these can be spoken only by a saintly soul who has been deeply touched by the presence of his God, in the discharge of his dedicated duties.

The proclamation for a national Fast Day for March 30, 1863, brings out even more clearly the prophetic elements in Lincoln's point of view. A part of it runs thus: "Whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people?" [9] This reads like an excerpt from the Prophet Ezekiel and other Prophets. In this call to repentance, Lincoln's belief that it will bring pardon from on high; that ultimately the right will be vic-

[8] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 518.
[9] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 155.

torious; that God rules in the affairs of men and nations; that only those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord, and that our country has been punished by civil war because of our presumptuous sins, exhibits his indisputable similarity to the teachings of his spiritual ancestors, the Prophets. You have here the same indestructible faith, the same complete trust, the same assurance that the mercy of the Almighty will forgive our sins if we repent. You have the same appeal and hope that made them feel that Almighty God was with them, guided them, used them to carry out His purpose to preserve and redeem just, God-fearing and God-worshipping nations. The proclamations that Lincoln issued regarding Thanksgiving, Prayer, Fasting, Repentance and Forgiveness form a source of splendid evidence of his spiritual relationship to, and dependence on, the biblical teachers.

The third Annual Message, given December 8, 1863, opens with a statement of gratitude to God: "Another year of health, and of sufficiently abundant harvest has passed. For these, and especially for the improved condition of our national affairs, our renewed and profoundest gratitude." [10] The Almighty is thanked for his help in keeping the nation out of the harm that disloyal citizens hoped to bring upon it. With an expression of thanks to the army and navy, he closes the address. The Annual Message of December 6, 1864 begins also with the statement of thanks to God for the "blessings of health and abundant harvests" which claim "profoundest gratitude to Almighty God." [11] Men without faith in God and without religion in their hearts, do not begin messages in this way. Gratitude to God was one of the essentials of the Biblical teachers—more particularly the Psalmists.

Throughout Lincoln's speeches, letters and other writ-

[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 36.
[11] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 136.

ings, there is a consistent flow of declarations regarding God, right, justice, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, and similar subjects. In the last five or six years of his life, Lincoln was dominated by a prophetic, religious consciousness that influenced his daily life. He was, as was once said of the philosopher Spinoza, a God-intoxicated man.

Lincoln issued seven Thanksgiving Proclamations. In each one of these and particularly in the last one, dated October 20, 1864,[12] is there a deep sense of piety and gratitude to God for the events that had occurred. In all of them there was an expression of thankfulness that one would expect in national Thanksgiving Proclamations. But in the last, there were special circumstances which made the President particularly grateful. The war had been going on for some four years, without the end in sight. Many Northerners had been beginning to lose faith or to wonder whether, after all, the struggle was worth while. Lincoln himself, was losing friends rather than making them. The political situation was such as to make some think that Lincoln would fail to gain the nomination for a second term. The North had lost somewhere around one hundred thousand men, and many more were wounded. Conditions were very severe and there was a more than average amount of bitterness because the war had lasted so long. Then things began to happen. Mobile was taken from the Confederates and rendered useless as a seaport for the benefit of the South; Sherman had practically surrounded Atlanta; Sheridan was victorious in the Shenandoah Valley and Grant was on the march. Lincoln saw the triumphant end of the war and, incidentally, that the grounds for political opposition to him were slipping, and he felt that if he were renominated, he would be re-elected. The last of his Thanksgiving Proclamations was given under these circumstances. I cite it here, because of its detail and

[12] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 55.

because it exhibits just the opposite state of mind that prompted his Fast Day Proclamation. In the latter we saw the grief, the humility and the consciousness of the sinfulness of the nation, with his deep hope that God will forgive, as indicated in a number of the prophetic writings. In the last Thanksgiving text we get something of the jubilant spirit of the Fortieth Chapter of Isaiah and some of the Psalms; a sense of gratefulness and appreciation from everyone in the land, for the many spiritual and material blessings now to become the lot of the United States, and all of these are the gift of the Almighty. Here is the text of the Proclamation written in pure, chaste, remarkably beautiful, and reverent English:

> It has pleased Almighty God to prolong our national life another year, defending us with His guardian care against unfriendly designs from abroad, and vouchsafing unto us in His mercy, many and signal victories over the enemy, who is of our own household. It has also pleased our Heavenly Father to favor as well our citizens in their homes, as our soldiers in their camps, and our sailors on the rivers and seas, with unusual health. He has largely augmented our free population by emancipation and immigration, while he has opened to us new sources of wealth, and had crowned the labor of our workingmen in every department of industry with abundant rewards. Moreover he has been pleased to animate and inspire our minds and hearts with fortitude, courage, and resolution, sufficient for the great trial of civil war into which we have been brought by our adherence as a nation to the cause of freedom and humanity, and to afford to us reasonable hopes of an ultimate and happy deliverance from all our dangers and afflictions.
>
> Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday of November next, as a day which I desire to be observed by all my fellow-citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God, the

> beneficent Creator and Ruler of the universe. And I do further recommend to my fellow-citizens aforesaid, that on that occasion they do reverently humble themselves in the dust, and from thence offer up penitent and fervent prayers and supplications to the great Disposer of events for a return of the inestimable blessings of peace, union and harmony throughout the land which it has pleased him to assign as a dwelling-place for ourselves and for our posterity throughout all generations.

If one turns to Psalms Nine and Sixty-six, one inevitably gets into the spirit of this Thanksgiving message.

One notes that the dominant principles that are emphasized in Lincoln's speeches, debates, and proclamations are the preservation of the Union, the emphasis on religion expressed in terms of merciful justice, and the freedom of the slaves. His concern was nearly always the moral side of a question under consideration, and seldom if ever, the dogmatic or ritualistic. The miracle phase of religion was never touched and Herndon, Fell, Lamon and Whitney were correct. The deprivation of the Negroes' liberty was a moral issue. The preservation of the Constitution was a legal issue and the belief in God was religious, but not ritualistic, and was primary to both. While often the juridical phase of the slave-state was considered, it was never entirely separated from the moral, which had its roots in the religious philosophy of Moses, of the Prophets and Jesus. One can detect in Lincoln, an increasing interest in Negro welfare which at first was limited to the territories in which slavery did not exist, which was extended later, and then climaxed by the Emancipation Proclamation. Though the Emancipation Proclamation was a necessary military measure, there is no doubt that in the mind of the Emancipator, there was a driving moral and religious urge to have him do what he felt that the merciful Creator would have him do—liberate a per-

secuted group of His children. Could it not be that as Lincoln grew older and read the Bible more, as we are told, the Negro question became more important to him in its relation to the prophetic teachings on social justice and individual righteousness?

XIII

THERE IS NO QUESTION about the fact that he went to the Bible for inspiration. His faith must, at times, have made his advisors and friends apprehensive—it was so extraordinarily deep, bordering on the fanatic. His own admissions that without it he might have lost his reason, did not help to allay the apprehensiveness. When once he decided that he was on God's side in any matter, which meant to him that God was with him, he was as immovable as a rock. Evidently his faith was well founded, because in the end, it did win. Victory for the Union later confirmed him in his belief that he was right in his following after the Prophets, who, he believed, were nearer to the Almighty than he was; and who, so far as he was concerned, had to some extent pierced the veil which separated mortal man from the Eternal God. He appeared to be completely satisfied to be guided by their words, their trust and God's direction.

Innumerable times does he assert that it is inhuman injustice to maintain slavery. He constantly repeats the gist of the prophetic verses which deal with the sanctification of the Almighty through justice. He is acquainted with verses like "The Lord of Hosts is exalted through justice and God the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness." [1] "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue." [2] "Doth the Almighty pervert justice?" [3] "My people hath been lost sheep because they have

[1] Isaiah 5:16.
[2] Deuteronomy 16:19-20.
[3] Job 8:3-7.

sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice." [4] "O princess of Israel, execute justice and righteousness, remove exactions from my people, said the Lord." [5] These are of course, only a few of the very many statements about "justice." In the Lincoln-Douglas debates there are many references to the injustice of slavery and to the immorality involved in the institution. Said Lincoln in the Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854: "Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature; opposition to it, is in the love of justice; these principles are an eternal antagonism, and when brought into collision so fiercely as slavery extension brings them, shocks and throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow." [6] He accused those who did not believe that God was interested in the black man of reading the Bible wrongly.

> To read in the Bible, as the word of God himself, that "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," and to preach therefrom that "in the sweat of other man's faces shalt thou eat bread," and to preach therefrom to my mind can scarcely be reconciled with honest sincerity. When a year or two ago those professedly holy men of the South met in the semblance of prayer and devotion, and, in the name of Him who said, "as ye would all men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them," appealed to the Christian world to aid them in doing to a whole race of men, as they would have no man do unto themselves, to my thinking they contemned and insulted God and His church far more than did Satan when he tempted the Saviour with the Kingdoms of the earth. The devils attempt was no more false, and far less hypocritical.[7]

Lincoln did not believe that there was one Bible for the white people and another for the black.

William E. Barton, says that Lincoln's "Second Inau-

[4] Jeremiah 7:5; 50:6.

[5] Ezekiel 45:9.

[6] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. II, p. 271.

[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 368.

gural [8] was itself a kind of leaf out of the books of the Prophets." [9]

There is no thought in the presentation of this study to maintain that Abraham Lincoln was accustomed to quote Biblical statements exactly; but anyone who is very familiar with the Scriptures notes frequently the great resemblance to them in structure, words and thought. Very often we find the word "judgment" is translated where the original calls for "justice." Not all the prophets emphasized the same ideal—some paid more attention to social justice and individual righteousness; some to repentance and return to God; some to universal peace; some to the dignity of the human individual; some to the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man; some to individual morality and national purity; some to sincerity of worship and to the beauty of holiness. But all accepted as a fact the authority, the immanence, and the Providential direction of their God. And all condemned Israel because of its violation of what they considered God's statutes and ordinances, just as Lincoln condemned his countrymen who were guilty of this.

For many years as I studied the religion of Lincoln; I tried to formulate it into some definite framework of the known western religions. The contrast between its highly ethical and practical content on the one side, and his superstition and dream-beliefs on the other, made it impossible to fit it into any one of our western classifications. Realistic and applied ethics, and visions and evil omens, just do not fit together into any system, except mysticism—and that is no defined religion. I noticed the almost complete absence of the commonly known dogmas of traditional or historical Christianity. I was impressed by the fact that there are practically no pronouncements or even references to the

[8] Barton, Wm. E., *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), p. 262.

[9] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 333.

Virgin birth, the birth of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the remission of sins through the blood of Jesus, to the infallibility of the Pope and to the sacraments. He was not a Catholic, so he would not be expected to have the same attitude towards the last two items, as Catholic Christians do. I find no reference to either the Nicene or Apostolic Creeds. With the exception of the letter to his half-brother at the approaching death of his father, there is little reference to immortality, though he had a belief in some kind of future life. We have ample evidence, as noted, that he had no use for the accoutrements and the ritualistic instruments of the Christian or any other religion. He did not believe either in the use or the efficacy of ceremonials, and appeared to be completely non-sectarian in his belief.

I doubt whether Lincoln was familiar with the early Christian theological controversies, the battles between the Arians and the Athanasians—those who believed in the Unity of God, and those who believed in the Trinity. I have never read that he knew anything about the Council of Nicea or the controversies among the early bishops who determined the basis of present-day Christianity. He may have said something about this in that little book which he is alleged to have written against Christianity and which a friend of his is supposed to have burned in order that Lincoln's political career would not be destroyed. I do not recall the phrase "ethical monotheism" anywhere in his writings, and yet he was an avowed ethical monotheist. I have serious doubts whether Lincoln ever read anything and certainly not much, that deals with theological disputes and theories, or that he knew anything of what we now call "religious philosophy." Herndon [10] tells us that he had read Volney's *Ruins* and Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, both anti-traditional Christian books, and that he loaned Lincoln

[10] Herndon, Wm. H., *History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (N.Y.: A. & C. Boni, 1930), p. 396.

a lecture on the "Effects of Slavery on the American people," by Theodore Parker. Lincoln liked this lecture in which Parker was warm in his commendation of Lincoln, and which contained the sentence "democracy is direct self-government over all the people, for all the people, by all the people." The future President marked this passage with a pencil, and "which in substance," says Herndon, "he afterwards used in the Gettysburg address."

Theodore Parker did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, did not accept the teachings of the Nicene or the Apostolic creeds, and believed in the unity of God as opposed to the Trinitarian Church tradition. He believed in the validity of the moral law, and in some type of immortality, but gave no detailed description of Heaven or Hell as pictured in the Christian tradition. He was an exponent of what is now called Unitarianism, whose fundamental tenets are the Unity and Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man. These are the same teachings that Lincoln, to all intents and purposes, believed basic to his religion. But Lincoln did not know Parker until some time after his own conception of religion began to develop; but both Parker, who was an Old Testament scholar, and Lincoln, who was a Bible student, got their religious ideals from the same source.

XIV

For a reader who is not a student of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and who has not been particularly interested in the religion of the prophetic teachers, it will be at first difficult to realize, except by further study, to what extent the religious or ethical principles which Lincoln advocated resemble the ethical teachings of a Moses, or an Isaiah, or a Jeremiah or Jesus. The more one investigates and digests these similarities, the truer becomes my contention that Lincoln leaned heavily on the Biblical teachers, and on the ideals as well as on the goals of these great characters who were the source—though Lincoln might have been unconscious of it—of his religious inspiration.

I have included in this study, a number of passages from the Bible, so those who are curious enough to make the comparisons I suggest, may have the material handy. The number must be limited, but I think that I have enough of them to indicate unmistakably that Lincoln studied the Bible, knew these great verses that have so influenced the western world, and used them as he advanced in age, responsibility and wisdom.

In the Holiness Code (Chaps. XVII-XXVI) in the Book of Leviticus, one finds the source of the teachings to live righteously, not to rob nor steal and to love one's neighbor as one's self. "Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbor, nor rob him; thou shalt not hate thy neighbor in thy heart; ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgement; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, I am the Lord." [1] In the Book of Deu-

[1] Holiness Code, Leviticus 17-26; 19:12-18.

teronomy, we read: "God doth execute justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loveth the stranger. Love ye therefore the stranger for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." "When thou drawest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it." [2] The Ten Commandments [3] in Exodus and in Deuteronomy must not be overlooked in the Mosaic contribution. Nor must we forget the grand visions of universal peace in Isaiah and Micah.[4]

In a work of this sort, it is impossible as well as inadvisable to give more than a few examples of what the prophets taught. But if one is to accept the proposition that Lincoln was deeply indebted to them for his religious point of view, a few more passages illustrating their ideas are not out of place. An attempt to do this and show something of their ethical insights and beliefs, follows.

In quoting these passages, I do not mean to imply that Lincoln ever used them or quoted them verbatim. I want to indicate what I mean by saying that the teachings of their authors, the points of view in them, the philosophy they inculcate and sometimes the very form and style of their expression, influenced the point of view, the attitude towards life and the ideals which motiviated Lincoln's conduct. I am convinced that these teachings were the primary sources of Lincoln's religious beliefs.

This is from Fifth Book of Moses:

> Man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, doth man live. And thou shalt consider in thy heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord chasteneth thee. And thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways and fear Him. For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths springing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat

[2] Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 20:10.
[3] Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21.
[4] Isaiah 2:2-5; Micah 4:1-4.

and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarcity, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. And thou shalt eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his ordinances, and his statutes, which I command thee this day; lest when thou hast eaten and are satisfied and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God.[5]

These verses are reminiscent of the "fasting" proclamations, both in form and substance.

From the Prophet Isaiah:

Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; and give ear to the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah; To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offering of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations to me; it is an offering of abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath, the holding of assembly service, I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn assembly. Your new moons and holydays, my soul hateth; they are a burden to me; . . . when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do that which is good. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge justly the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Wherefore saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, I will ease me of my adversaries and avenge me of mine enemies, and I will turn my hand upon thee and will purge away thy dross as with lye, and will take away all thine alloy, and I will restore thy judges as at first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward thou shalt be called the city of

[5] Deuteronomy 8:3-14.

righteousness, the faithful city; Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return of her, with righteousness. But the destruction of the transgressors and the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and thou hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy stronghold; at eventide, behold terror, and before the morning, they are not.

The city with its stir shall be deserted, the mound and the towers shall be dens forever; and joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks, until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then justice shall dwell in the wilderness, and the righteousness shall abide in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence forever. And my people shall abide in a peaceable habitation. Thus saith the Lord: Keep ye justice and do righteousness. Happy is the man that doeth this and the son of man that holdeth fast by it that keepeth the Sabbath from profaning it; and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.[6]

From a Book of Jeremiah, we cull many verses in this mood: "Behold a storm of the Lord is gone forth in fury, a sweeping storm. It shall whirl upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have executed and until he have performed the purpose of his heart." [7]

In the mood of thankfulness, akin to that of the last Thanksgiving proclamation, we find:

Yet again shall there be heard in this place, where of ye say: It is waste without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that say: Give thanks to the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good,

[6] Isaiah 1:10-18; 17:10; 32:14-18; 56:1-2.
[7] Jeremiah 30:23.

for His mercy endureth forever, of them that bring offerings of thanksgiving into the House of the Lord. For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, saith the Lord.

In the mood of promise and redemption and if repentant, we find:

And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me: and I will pardon all their iniquities and whereby they have transgressed against me. And the city shall be to me for a name of joy, for a praise and a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good I do unto them, and shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure unto it.[8]

Lincoln's plea for the return of the United States to justice and right reminds one of this verse from the Prophet Ezekiel:

But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him; for his righteousness that he hath done, he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord; and not rather that he should turn from his ways and live? [9]

These sections from Amos and Habakkuk recall Lincoln's angry retort to hypocrites who misread the Bible:

For thus saith the Lord to the House of Israel: Seek ye me and live. Seek the Lord and live. Ye who turn justice to wormwood, and cast righteousness to the ground. They hate him who reproves in the gate (who dispenses justice in the court); and they abhor him who speaketh uprightly. Therefore because ye trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat; ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them. Ye have planted pleasant vine-

[8] Jeremiah 33:8–9.
[9] Ezekiel 18:21–23.

yards but ye shall not drink the wine thereof. For I know how manifold are your transgressions and how mighty are your sins. Ye that afflict the just, that take a bribe, and that turn aside the poor in the gate (from their rights). Seek good and not evil, so the Lord of God of Hosts will be with you.

Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his; woe to him that gaineth evil gains for his house that he may set his next on high. Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city in iniquity. For (in the end) the earth shall be filled with the glory of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea.[10]

From the teachings of Jesus, Lincoln received the picture of that kind of life that could lead to perfection:

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven, is perfect. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. No man can serve two masters; you cannot serve God and his Mammon. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.[11]

[10] Amos 5:6–7, 11–14; Habakkuk 2:6,9,12.
[11] Matthew 5:6, 8, 20, 48; 6:5, 14, 24, 33; 7:12.

XV

WHILE ALL the great biblical teachers stressed the relationship between God and His children and pointed out what this meant, there was one prophet whose life and teachings closely paralleled those of Lincoln. I speak of the Prophet Jeremiah who has also been called the Man of Sorrows. Born and reared in Anathoth, a small town near Jerusalem, of a well to do priestly family, and distressed by the resurgence of the nation back to iniquity, injustice and sin, he gave himself up to preaching those teachings which he knew would save the nation if they were observed. Even his phraseology reminds one of the Lincoln proclamations. He spoke with bitterness of the constant violations of God's commands; he castigated those who believed in the "rightness" of the wrongs that were destructive of ethical ideals. He reminded his people that if they exclude the Almighty from their lives, and live only for those things that dazzle the eye and please the ear, the great spiritual heritage of Israel would be destroyed. He felt poignantly as did Lincoln, the truth that without God and His precepts nations must perish!

Jeremiah was crushed by the conduct of the ruling powers, as was Lincoln pained by his predecessor in the White House and his clique. Powerful personalities were on the side of those who opposed Jeremiah, just as there were such in opposition to Lincoln. Judea was steeped in that kind of living that the prophet knew would lead to ultimate destruction. He saw this, and his soul cried out

in bitterness. But there were influential exhorters who stood out against him; he called them "false" prophets, but they were heeded by the populace and by influential personages, even advisors of the king. They called Jeremiah a traitor, and not only put him in prison twice, but because the king feared to have him put to death, the priests and the false prophets, with the permission of the king, had him thrown into a pit, "and in the pit there was no water, but mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire." [1] The king apparently relented, and had Jeremiah removed from the pit. But that did not prevent him from addressing his people. He was deeply distressed but patient and hopeful, but he did not run away from his, as he believed, God-given task. There were times when he rued it. He cursed the day he was born. He had pleaded that he was unfit for the task which the Almighty called him to do. He had been called against his own will to condemn the wrong-doers!

> The word of the Lord came to me saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. But I said, Lord, I cannot speak for I am a child. But the Lord said, Say not I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak; be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Cursed be the day wherein I was born; the day wherein my mother bore me, let it not be blessed. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed in shame.[2]

In the Lincoln Scrapbook in the Library of Congress, the following statement is recorded as a part of the conversation the President had with an old friend, the Reverend Mr. N. W. Miner of Springfield: "I would gladly if I could," said Lincoln, "take my neck from under the yoke, and go home

[1] Jeremiah 38:6.
[2] Jeremiah 1:5-8; 20:14-18.

with you to Springfield, and live as I used, in peace with my friends, rather than to endure this harassing kind of life. But it has pleased Almighty God to place me in my present position and, looking to him for wisdom and divine guidance, I must work out my destiny as best I can."

The unhappy days of May, 1863, when the Battle of Chancellorsville was lost, were among the worst trials of the President. Carl Sandburg tells how "piteous, broken and ghostlike the President looked, as he clasped his hands behind his back, and walking up and down the room cried, 'My God, My God, what will the country say, what will the country say!' " [3]

Colonel W. O. Stoddard who was one of Lincoln's private secretaries, relates that he was present when word of the defeat of Chancellorsville came, and he heard the President utter the above exclamation. That night Mr. Stoddard had to work late. His room was opposite Mr. Lincoln's and the door to both rooms was ajar. For hours he heard the footsteps of the distressed President, as he slowly walked across the room. Now and then there was a pause. Stoddard believed that Abraham Lincoln did then what he had done numberless times before.[4]

The President no doubt communed with his God, whom he sought at moments of great disturbance. There is no certainty of this in this case. But if he did, now in throes of deepest grief at the realization of the great amount of sorrow and mourning that would follow upon the knowledge of this new defeat, 11,000 dead on the Union side, one wonders whether he thought of that deeply touching verse in Jere-

[3] Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1939), Vol. II, p. 97.

[4] This story of the tragic night of Chancellorsville and of Lincoln in the White House, in May of 1863, as told by William O. Stoddard, and retold in the *New York Times Magazine* June 28, 1942, by his son. "I have written it," he said "as it was told to me by my father, he marching up and down the room, with a fighting fire in his eyes."

miah: "My bowels, my bowels, I writhe in pain; the chambers of my heart, my heart moaneth within me. I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the horn, the alarm of the war; destruction followeth upon destruction, for the whole land is spoiled." [5] Or whether he thought of that other tragic cry uttered after the destruction of Jerusalem, "Thus saith the Lord: A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, for they are not." [6]

Both Jeremiah and Lincoln were unique characters and both lived in the days of their country's greatest peril. Jeremiah well knew that there were other exhorters who called themselves "Prophets"—but to him, they did not represent the will of God. Lincoln recognized the existence as well as the influence of outstanding people who opposed him, but to him, they did not represent the will of God. Jeremiah was persecuted and according to tradition, later killed because he refused to follow the mob. Lincoln suffered the same fate for his stand for what he believed to be the truth. Jeremiah could not run away from his task, though at times he was almost overwhelmed by it, and as we saw, cursed the day he was born. As he carried on and saw that his message was unheeded, his grief made him the "Man of Sorrow." Lincoln saw with crystal-clear vision that the nation must perish if he submitted to those whom he regarded as enemies, and therefore he could not run away from his task. One recalls the conversation of Lincoln with Judge Joseph Gillespie, an old friend in Illinois, which took place in Lincoln's home in January, 1861, in which Lincoln is alleged to have said: "I see the duty devolving upon me. I have read upon my knees, the story of Gethsemane, where the son of God

[5] Jeremiah 4:19.
[6] Jeremiah 31:15.

prayed in vain that the cup of bitterness might pass from him. I am in the Garden of Gethsemane now, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing." [7]

Both Jeremiah and Lincoln believed that the terrible visitations upon their countries were the results of national sinful living, and both believed that peace would come only when those who strayed would return to the right path and repent of their misdeeds. Said Jeremiah:

> The Lord could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the Lord and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in His law nor in His statutes nor in His testimonies; therefore this evil is happened to you this day.[8]

One is reminded of these words by a portion of the National Fast Day Proclamation on March 30, 1863:

> We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us. It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness. . . . I therefore designate the 30th day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer.[9]

---

[7] Johnstone, William J., *How Lincoln Prayed.* (N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1931), p. 23.

[8] Jeremiah 44:22-23.

[9] Basler, Roy P. (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Vol. VI, p. 155.

If the words and the setting differ in details, there can be no question about the sentiment and the feelings as well as the purpose of the proclamation, being wholly in the prophetic mood.

In Jeremiah we can detect what was almost a pattern for the thinking of Lincoln in the framing of his fasting and repentance proclamations, and in the speeches, where ethical subjects were mentioned.

> Thus saith the Lord: Execute ye justice and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood, in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in, by the gates of this house, kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he and his servants and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.[10]

We repeat in conclusion, that Lincoln's belief was the same as that of the prophets in its ethical implications. He believed implicitly, as they did, that God alone was the Father and righteous Ruler of the universe, who meted out punishment for sin, but pardon and forgiveness for repentance and return to His ways. This process did not include ritual and ceremony, necessarily. His religion was a this-worldly ethical discipline based upon a wholesome relationship between God and man, and man and man; in justice, righteousness, mercy and peace as the social instrumentalities in a divine moral order, under the governance of the Almighty. One recalls the serious answer of Lincoln to a committee of clergymen, as told by Carpenter. Said one of them: "I hope the Lord is on our side." Replied Lincoln: "I am not at all concerned about that, for I know the Lord is

[10] Jeremiah 7:3-7; 22:3-9.

always on the side of right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

Lincoln was as certain that God revealed Himself to him, as was Moses; as sure that God was with him in his prayers, as was Jeremiah; as certain that God was right, as was Isaiah; as positive that God was just, as was Amos; as determined in his belief that God would forgive the nation for its sins if it would repent, and return to His laws, as were Ezekiel and Hosea; as conscious of God's perfection as was Jesus, and as certain that God was the "over-ruling Providence," as were all of these.

In a collection of *Words of Lincoln* compiled by O. H. Oldroyd, we find the following interview with Reverend J. T. Duryea of New York in 1864. It is reminiscent of a conversation that the President had with his old Sprinfield friend, Reverend N. W. Miner in Washington in 1862, but is more positive. Lincoln said: "If it were not for my firm belief in an over-ruling Providence, it would be difficult for me in the midst of such complications of affairs, to keep my reason on its seat. But I am confident that the Almighty has His plans and will work them out; and whether we see it or not, they will be the wisest and best for us. . . . I have always taken counsel of Him, and refer to Him my plans, and have never adopted a course of proceeding without being assured, as far as I could be, of His approbation." [11] It sounds very much like a restatement of "Thus saith the Lord" to the prophets.

No Biblical teacher to my knowledge has given us a clearer statement of his own nearness to, and dependence upon God, than Lincoln. The complete, wholehearted surrender to His will, and the unfathomable faith which undergirded it, were the spiritual forces that gave the harassed

[11] Oldroyd, O. H., *Words of Lincoln* (Wash., D.C.: 1895), p. 137.

President courage to carry on one of the most important struggles in the annals of human history. The survival of Lincoln to the unfortunate day of his death, and with that the preservation of the Union, were due to the influence of religion as it developed in his consciousness through his study of the Bible, and especially through the lives of the immortal prophets; and of all of these, Jeremiah resembled Lincoln most, and I believe, influenced him most. Both feared that they would not live to see their work completed, and both were martyrs to what they believed to be the truth. Jeremiah lived to see his nation conquered and his beloved Jerusalem destroyed; Lincoln lived to see his faith in victory vindicated, but like Moses of old, could see the promise fulfiled only from a distance.

INDEX

Abolition, 71
Aesop's *Fables*, 66
Amos, 49, 82, 109
Angle, Paul M., 11, 18, 20
Antietam, 41, 42
Arnold, Isaac N., 61

Baltimore Presbyterian Synod, 57
Bateman, Newton, 53
Barton, William S., 11, 12, 35, 36, 37, 52, 66, 101
Basler, Roy P., 11, 18, 20
Beveridge, Albert J., 11, 20
Bible, 39, 64–69, 72, 74
"Bobby" (Lincoln's son), 38
Bradford, William, 16
Brooks, Noah, 53, 75
Browne, Robert H., 22, 23

Carpenter, F. B., 34, 54, 58
Catton, Bruce, 91
Chase, Salmon P., 86
Chiniquy, Father, 27ff., 32, 52, 53
Chittenden, L. E., 32, 67
Congressional Resolution on a National Fast Day, 91
Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24 (fn.), 28
Colonization of slaves, 94
Cooper Institute Address, 58
Crockett, Davy, 85

Davis, Judge David, 58
Deming, Henry C., 70
Dissenters, 15
Douglas, Stephen, 33
Durand, Grace Garratt, 59
Durley, Williamson, 71
Duryea, J. T., 117

Elijah, 23, 62, 76, 82, 85
Elizabethtown, 22
Emancipation Proclamation, 33, 42, 86, 87
Emancipation of slaves, 94
Ezekiel, 76, 82, 109

Fell, Jesse W., 13, 72, 75, 79
Fredericksburg, 86
Friends Society of Iowa, 57

Gentryville, 36
Gettysburg, 29, 41
Giddings, Joshua, 44
Gillespie, Joseph, 114
Golden Rule, 68
Grant, Gen. Ulysses S., 96
Greenview, Ill., 19
Gridley, Asahel, 23
Gurney, Eliza, 32, 74

Habakkuk, 82, 110
Hanks, John, 50, 61, 66
Hay, John M., 73, 75
Herndon, William H., 12, 36, 50, 53, 61, 75, 79, 103
Hodgenville, 22
Holland, J. G., 11, 56
Holiness Code, 105
Hosea, 76, 82

Illinois legislature, 71
Independents, 15
Isaiah, 76, 81, 87, 105, 106

Jamestown, Va., 16
Jeremiah, 76, 81, 87, 105, 108, 111, 112ff.
Jesus, 12, 52, 53, 62, 64, 72, 76, 80, 82, 98, 103, 105, 110
John the Baptist, 23

Lamon, Ward Hill, 12, 33, 38, 39, 40, 61, 77, 79
Lee, Gen. Robert E., 42
Lincoln, Thomas, 22, 36
Lutheran Church, 55

Malachi, 45, 82
Matheny, James, 13, 79
Mayflower, 15
Maynard, Mrs. N. C., 59, 60
Menard County, 19
Micah, 82
Miner, Rev. N. W., 55, 56, 112, 117
Mobile, 96
Moses, 25, 32, 72, 76, 80, 81, 98, 105, 106

New Orleans, 50
Nicolay, John G., 73, 75
Nolin Creek Farm, 22

Old Testament, 39
Oldroyd, O. H., 117
Owens, Mary, 43

Paine, Thomas *(Age of Reason),* 24, 103
Parker, Theodore, 104
Peoria Lincoln-Douglas debate, 45, 46, 48, 101
Pierce, Henry L., 44
Pilgrims, 15
Plimouth Plantation, 16
Plymouth Rock, 15ff.
Pond brothers, 19
Premonitions, 37
Proclamation for a National Fast Day, 91ff., 115
Prophets, 70, 80, 81

Quincy speech, 47

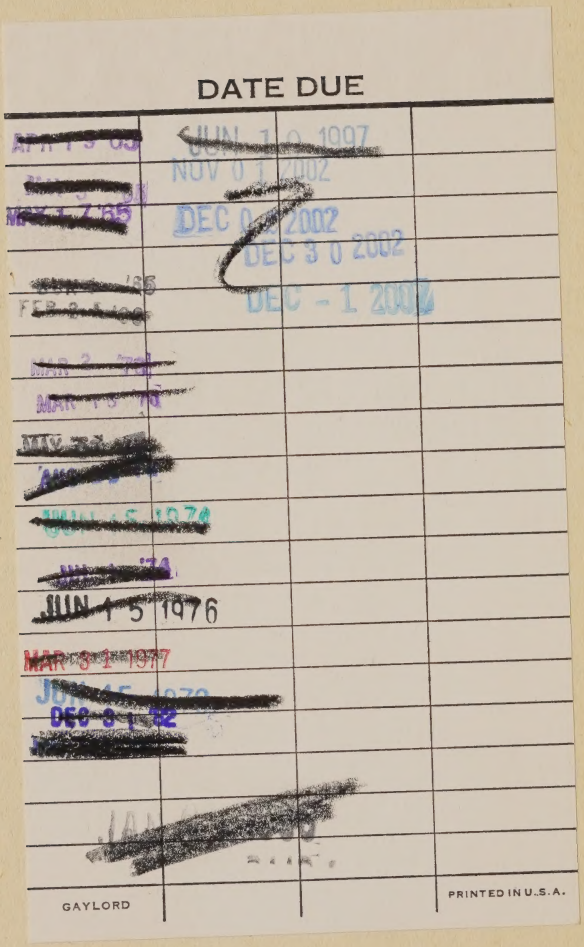
Randall, J. G., 18, 20
Rankin, Henry E., 25ff.
Raymond, Henry, 11
Rusling, Gen. J. F., 28

Sandburg, Carl, 11, 25, 113
Scrooby Dissenters, 15
Sheridan, Gen. Philip, in Shenandoah Valley, 96
Sherman, Gen. Wm. P., 41, 96
Shiloh, 55
Sickles, Gen. Daniel E., 25, 29, 30, 60
Slavery, 45
Society of Colonial Dames, 17
Speed, Joshua, 13, 27, 31, 51, 67
Speed, Mary, 66
Springfield, 23
Stoddard, Wm. O., 101
Sunderland, Byron, 32

"Tad" (Lincoln's son), 38
Ten Commandments, 68
Terre Haute, 38
Thomas, Benjamin P., 18, 20
Trenton, New Jersey, 84

Vicksburg, 30

Weed, Thurlow, 75
Weem's *Life of Washington,* 84
Welles, Gideon, 42, 87
Whitney, H. C., 12, 27, 30, 64
Wilson, James F., 56


DATE DUE
JUN 1 5 1976
GAYLORD
PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01112 4205